

SERMONS,

E1253
General

INTENDED CHIEFLY

FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES.

BY

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PREFACE.

It is with much diffidence, that the author gives this small volume to the public. The reiterated wishes of many friends have prevailed on him to engage in its publication. Yet perhaps these wishes would have proved unsuccessful, had not the author hoped, with the blessing of God, to supply in part, at least, a deficiency, which in reference to *domestic* purposes the very *excellence* of printed Sermons, he conceives more or less to present. Discourses the most able, the most profound, the most interesting, from the *copiousness*, as from the *structure* of the composition are generally more suitable to the pulpit than to the social circle. Detached from the vivacity and force of a public ministration, the attention,

it is to be feared, is often wearied by their *length*, while the *modest* feelings of the young are often, in a degree, *wounded* by the necessity laid upon them to address the elder branches of the family assembled on the Sunday Evening, in language altogether hortatory and pastoral.

It has been the desire of the author in the following discourses, to remedy these two inconveniences, and to offer them to the world simply as *Family Sermons*. In pursuit of this object he has studied *brevity*, and has divested his discourses of their *ministerial character*; so that the youthful reader may not feel himself to be a teacher of others, but rather to be one of the persons taught. Under these circumstances, the author trusts this volume may not be unacceptable to the public. He begs to remark, in allusion to the Sermons themselves, that with one or two exceptions, they were written and delivered on the continent, chiefly to the English residents at Florence, Geneva, and Tours. Hence they refer to the most elementary points of Christianity. The *specific impression* which the

author wishes to leave upon the minds of his readers, is the indissoluble connection between *holiness* and *happiness*. He considers Christianity to be a *voice* from a higher world, which invites the *guilty*, the *weary*, the *forlorn*, to link their hearts and their hopes to Jesus Christ, in whom alone they can find true and unbroken rest.

The author is deeply conscious of the faint and most inadequate conceptions which he has been able to delineate of the great subjects connected with eternity. He wishes they were more worthy of the public attention. If, however, a single heart in a single family should feel any additional warmth or consolation from his suggestions, he shall bless God in gratitude and praise. To his power and *grace* he desires to entrust this humble effort to do good. To him he would refer every result,

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SERMON I.

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“UNTO YOU FIRST GOD HAVING RAISED UP HIS SON JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES.”

A RESTLESS pursuit of happiness is visible on every side. Is this happiness ever attained? Is the blank in the heart ever filled up? Is the soul ever satisfied? The answer to this question will probably vary according to the age, the animal spirits, the outward lot of the person to whom it may be proposed. It may be doubted, whether in any case the answer will be entirely affirmative. The history of man on this side the grave, is like the history of the natural world: the seasons change; if the winter chills, the summer warms; if darkness wraps in its shade, light cheers with its brilliancy. Thus joy and sorrow, hope and fear, satisfaction and perplexity are mingled

together. In some minds the cheerful, in others the gloomy preponderates; in *every* case the two are mingled, and all men will probably agree that the lot of each admits of addition, both to its comforts and its deprivations. Under these circumstances, it is very material to know whether there be any mode of defending ourselves against such an increase of sorrow, and of insuring to ourselves such an increase of comfort. It is very material to know the possible extent both of our misery and of our consolation. In every age many have occupied themselves in collecting facts, in examining evidence upon this matter; and they have frequently given to the world the result of their inquiries. Among these inquirers, those who have not possessed any direct information from God, and those who have neglected to avail themselves of such information, have lamentably failed as to the extent of *the resources* which they have opened to mankind. They have neither probed deep enough the wounds, nor administered widely enough to the sorrows of man. They have too much left him the enigma which they found him, and all their best precepts have been impotent to shield him from the severities of his condition. It is the Bible alone which tells us *wherefore* we are miserable, and *how* we may be happy. We may read volumes on all the controversies of science;

we may surround ourselves with all the prosperity, the honour, the emolument, the rank, the taste, the genius, the wealth of the earth, and we shall still remain weak, inconstant, and the ultimate prey of death. On the other hand, one sentence of the Scriptures comprehended and believed, may put us in possession of present peace and of eternal life! Oh who can tell the value of the single verse now before our eyes! “God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you by turning away every one of you from your iniquities.” Here is a chart to the wanderer, a light to the benighted, a shelter to the forlorn, a certainty to the dubious! Here is information which has often placed a child on an infinitely higher level than that on which the proudest philosopher has ever stood! Would to God we had all a heart to receive it! It points out precisely the source of human wretchedness, and the full remedy of which that wretchedness admits. Our misery lies chiefly in the circumstances of our *moral* condition; we are wretched under the effects of our *iniquities*. Our remedy must be found *in the return of our affections to God*; God sent Christ to bless us by turning us away *from our iniquities*.

I. Our sorrows mainly issue from *the depravity of our affections*. We are guilty before God. We are under a curse; ourselves and

the earth on which we dwell. God made man innocent and happy, and surrounded him with every thing adapted to his situation ; but he believed the opinion of his foe rather than the decision of his friend. The fatal counsel polluted his heart and destroyed his peace. In that hour his nature received a tremendous wrench. Every thing connected with his lot fell into disorder. He became obnoxious to the penalty of death, while the law of holy love no longer bound him to his God or to his kindred. What is the human history from that hour to this? Can we do otherwise than sicken over the details of human conduct? A few rays may occasionally gild the pages as we turn them over ; but the narrative, in general, is dark and unfriendly. It is a narrative in which individually man appears continually to prey upon man, and collectively nations to oppress nations. It is a narration of crimes and of blood. It were obvious to ask what those who deny the depravity of man can make of his history, and of the inefficacy of all his municipal regulations? Certainly his passions, earthly and selfish, spurn every barrier when occasions exasperate their movements. You may as well attempt, by the weight of the dews of heaven, to chain down the fiery matter which a volcano is about to cast forth.

But to come to *individual* experience : from

whence does the largest portion of our sufferings arise? Is it not from the disordered state of our affections? Is there not a disease of the heart, which is widely prevalent, and which no skill can heal? Are not envy, jealousy, hatred, revenge, discontent, ambition, licentiousness, avarice, the love of pleasure, and various other appetites dreadfully predominant? What painful contentions, what fearful results do these produce upon our minds! Our affections now withdrawn from God are fixed on what is sordid and shifting. In the *pursuit* of these objects, we are subject to ten thousand disappointments, and to bitter and unavailing struggles. And even beneath the sunshine of their *attainment*, the mere inadequacy of earthly things to fill the capacity of the mind produces something very like to a sensation of absolute misery! The absence of God from the affections is in itself an essential source of unhappiness, which would ever operate painfully even if no direct penalty were attached to the violation of God's law. There is, in fact, an indisputable connection between misery and the rejection of God from the affections. To reproduce happiness in a sinful being requires, therefore, a remedy applicable to the inward disease of his mind; a remedy which not only respects a new and favourable relation on the part of God, but also a new and holy state of the affections on the part of man. In

other words, the happiness of a sinner will depend first, upon the conviction that God has pardoned him, and secondly, upon the consciousness that he loves the Being who has thus tenderly dealt with him. That God has pardoned him is a thought which will remove all his fears, hush the tumult of his conscience, cast a brightness over the events of providence, extract the sting from death, and render the prospect of eternity brilliant. That he loves God is a consciousness derived from the now accordant state of his feelings with God's benefits; from a delight in the method of God's dealings with him, from a recoil of gratitude, from an approbation of God's character, from a sympathy with God's views and intentions, from an acquiescence in God's estimate of good and evil, from an internal perception of an intimate communion between God and his soul, whereby he cleaves to him as his friend, his father, his refuge, and his God. The presiding power of the universe is thus his shelter; the Almighty mind is in contact with his own; the eternal attributes of God gleam around him, as so many suns to cheer and to refresh him; mercy and purity and love seem to encompass him, and there is no evil which can ultimately wound his peace. He is travelling through a wilderness, but under infallible guidance, and under unassailable protection;

and he will soon reach his home, his heritage in the fair regions of eternity. Thus a sense of pardon, and a sense of love to that holy mercy which has forgiven him, bring him into tranquillity and safety. He is therefore happy.

It is not conceivable that an intelligent, but sinful creature, could be happy in any other way, while living under the administration of a holy God.

Now we find, that the remedy which Christianity brings forward to our view is exactly of this kind. “Jesus Christ came to bless you, by *turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*” God might have left us to reap the harvest of our rebellion. He might have left us to the unchecked operation of our wild and earthly passions; and had any messenger arrived from heaven, he might well have brought tidings of long and of final calamity. But “God’s ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.” “He hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation, by our Lord Jesus Christ.” He sent him to bless and not to curse, to save and not to destroy. He sent him to expiate our sin, and to render his mercy lovely in our eyes. He sent us pardon, and he sent us the means of loving the nature and the heart from which that pardon flowed.

In this complex operation the means of

human happiness are unfolded. The pardon of sin is complete and free, unclogged with any condition or qualification. "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." "I even I am he that blotteth out thine iniquities as a thick cloud, and as a cloud thy sins." "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The guilty offender may now look upwards and read the unequivocal declaration of pardon and redemption. The way is again open to God's mercy seat. The great High Priest stands before the throne to intercede for the criminal. "There is no more condemnation," but perfect reconciliation and grace.

Now the *belief* of this truth, under the agency of the Spirit, conveys *healing* to the heart. The discovery of this act of conciliation to any soul, is, in the highest degree purifying. It is impossible that the soul should retain its enmity, its reluctance to God's service, in the face of all this holy mercy. Sin becomes loathsome and odious when its consequences are thus made visible in the personal sufferings of Jesus Christ, and obedience to the will and mind of God then becomes identical with peace and happiness. Thus Christ blesses by turning

away from iniquity, by procuring at once the pardon of sin, and by healing the disease of sin; by restoring peace in the relations between God and man, and by making God's character the glowing object of attractive imitation.

We may here perceive the strange mistake into which many run who set up faith against works or works against faith. Does the faith of the Scriptures really exist in any heart which it does not more or less heal? Or can works be valuable in God's sight except they flow from faith in his character? The mistake in this controversy lies here. Men often account "salvation" to be a mere deliverance from the penalties of the law—the shutting of the gates of hell, and they account "faith" to be a speculative reception of certain notions respecting Christ; whereas salvation is a complex term comprising deliverance from all the *multiplied* effects of sin, of which the most disastrous are to be found in the sensual and earthly and selfish passions of the heart; and hence, the conversion *of the heart*, the return of the affections to God, is in very truth *salvation*. Imagine a criminal about to be executed for his offences, and at the same time to be wasted and tormented by the jail-fever. It is evident, that if his crime were pardoned he would still be miserable were his disease still

to hang upon his frame. And thus it is with the offender against God. The moral leprosy would degrade and sadden and destroy him, even under an oblivion of his offences on the part of God. The expiation of sin by Christ, and any opinion he might have as to that expiation, would leave him ultimately wretched, if his heart remained the abode of impurity and of selfishness. He believes that Christ died to deliver him from the wrath of God ; vain notion, except he believe also that Christ died to render sin odious and to tear out its roots from his soul ! He can only be happy as he regains God's image in his soul ; as his will is reduced into a conformity to the will of God ! What a senseless controversy then is this of faith and works ! “ Now abideth faith, hope, and charity,” these three. They live, they bloom together. The belief of God's mercy excites the hope of its enjoyment, and both endear the munificent Benefactor to the heart. The discovery of the holy goodness of God, and the wretchedness of alienation from him, carries captive the affections, and upon this discovery is founded the superstructure of moral virtue. Thus Christ blesses—thus Christ saves by *turning away* every one *from* his iniquities.

This statement may not, however, be deemed conclusive. The necessity for a “ healed heart ” to produce happiness, may perhaps be ques-

tioned. It may be said, that men have found a very large measure of enjoyment without a religious mind. The answer to such an assertion is, however, very apparent. If it pleased God always to withdraw himself from the notice of his creatures, and to encircle them with objects adapted to their lower appetites, a large amount of enjoyment might certainly be found separated from religion. But if God has declared, that the moment fast approaches when he will summon man to his bar, and force his conscience to a tribunal from which there lies no escape, it will then directly follow, that no man can long be happy whose mind is not prepared for such a scrutiny. Supposing that conscience sleeps until the moment of death, it will at least awake at the moment of the resurrection, and the result must be inconceivably dreadful. An infinite force will then surround us, and we shall find ourselves opposed to the direction in which that force acts; we must, therefore, be thwarted and unhappy.

The reluctance of our minds to God's moral government would, in fact, be even as hell to us. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." "They are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." This is surely a very intelligible statement of the ultimate misery of sin, and a statement which en-

tirely justifies the necessity for conversion of heart in order to reproduce happiness, while it corrects the strange delusion of mere notions without works. God is the governor of the world, and the principles of his government will one day become apparent to all his creatures: we can, therefore, only be happy as our views and affections are conformed to those principles. That man will certainly be happy ere long who loves God and who loves God's ways, and no other man can, with any pretension to common sense, expect to be happy. "All things," says the Bible, "work together for good to those who *love* God," and the reason is, that all things connected with their destiny will one day be adjusted to the steady operation of his moral government, and their *delight* will arise from the full accordance of that operation with their own principles. Then sorrow and sin will be for ever removed from them, and they will dwell in the blissful presence of God for ever!

How stupendous is this mystery of grace; how munificent is this mission of mercy to the guilty!

"Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus sent him to bless you by turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, it may be

here observed, is an important part of this statement, "God sent him to bless you, having raised him up," that is, from the dead.

The ultimate blessings of salvation are said to be purchased for man by the sufferings and death of Christ. "He gave his life a ransom for many." Hence he went down, in their behalf, to the grave: but he went down as a conqueror: "O death, I will be thy plague, O death, I will be thy destruction." He rested the truth of all his assurances to mankind upon the event of his resurrection: "If Christ be not raised ye are yet in your sins," and the doctrines of hope and of eternal life are fables and a dream!

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." "He was delivered for our offences and *was raised again* for our *justification*." Glorious and momentous truth! But what language can illustrate the full force of such an expression! It becomes, however, here a question of unspeakable importance, What sympathy have we in our *own* bosoms with this event? We may safely judge of the actual interest which we ourselves have in the resurrection of Christ, by the moral effect which the belief of it has produced upon our minds. Have we regarded it as the seal which God has affixed to the truth of every doctrine delivered by Jesus Christ

to man? And as such, do we behold in it the pledge to us of eternal mercy, the assurance of forgiveness of our sins, and of our own resurrection to everlasting felicity? Do we connect with it the continual mediation and friendship of the Son of God in our behalf? Do we contemplate him as near to the throne of God exercising uncontrouled power, and this in our favour? “Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.” “I am He that liveth and was dead, and am alive again and have the keys of death and of hell.” “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” “He that believeth on me shall never die.” “Let not your heart be troubled, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” What influence have these and similar declarations upon our moral and spiritual existence? Religion is not a ceremony or a name. It is a deep sympathy, binding down the soul to allegiance and to love. It is the cure of the heart, the consecration of our faculties and of our affections unto the Benefactor by whose hands we were created, and under whose benignant influence we still live and move and have our being. And as such it is a matter of distinct *consciousness*. Who doubts of the existence of his affection and of his fidelity as exercised towards his fellows? And why shall not this affection and this fidelity be

as much the subject of certainty and of consciousness when exercised towards God?

It is such; and at this moment, amidst all the shades of human character in Christendom, there are but *two* classes of men, those who love Christ and those who love him not. Those who love him, act as reasonably towards him as they do towards others. Because they love him they think of him, they study to please him, they draw their strength, their hope, their tranquillity, their purity from his inexhaustible fulness. It is not with them a matter of indifference whether or not his name be profaned, his regulations be set at nought, or his cause on earth be opposed. “Unto you that believe he is precious.” Hence with such persons godly anxiety is a reasonable sensation, and the hopes of eternity enter into all their calculations of human felicity.

But with those who love him not, no such godly anxiety exists. They have no sympathy with his views, no delight in his service. To lull the reproaches of conscience, and to throw some rays upon the darkness of the future, they may often appear as his worshippers; yea, they may kneel at his altar, and partake of the emblems of his body and of his blood; but they have no real attachment to his person and to his cause. They live happily with his foes, they sport with his laws, they make their con-

venience or their pleasure the standard of their religion! They sometimes say, “Lord, Lord,” but they make no heartfelt effort to do the thing which he says. But how fearful is the delusion which such worldly religionists practice upon themselves! What a cruel pang of disappointment will one day fasten upon their souls! “God is not to be mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”

If the Bible be the record of God’s ultimate dealings with mankind, then the eternal destiny of men rests upon their *allegiance* and their *attachment* to their Saviour! It is not an opinion, it is service, it is allegiance, it is loyalty to Christ, which God demands.

If these be yielded, all is ultimately safe. Then, amidst the sadnesses of life, our souls may often rise to the tone of grateful and exulting anticipation. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away!”

SERMON II.

ST. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST.

2 TIMOTHY i. 12.

"FOR I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED, AND AM PERSUADED THAT HE IS ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED UNTO HIM AGAINST THAT DAY."

THE declared and deliberate judgments of good and great men, in a good and great cause, have been ever held important and interesting by mankind, more especially if the opinions which they expressed have stood firm beneath the test of scorn and of persecution ; if the objects which they have had in view became more luminous and valuable, in proportion as the outward circumstances under which they were pursued became obscure and perplexed. We have ever felt, that such men excited our veneration, and deserved our sympathy. We have gone along with them in the generous struggles which they endured for human interests, and we have wished that such minds and such hearts had been multiplied ten thousand fold ! The views, the labours, the sufferings of the great Evangelist to the Gentiles, are exactly of this kind,

while their essential interest is augmented by the light which eternity shed over those struggles for human welfare. The cause in which he toiled limited not its views to sublunary interests. It cast its radiance beyond the barriers of the grave. The struggle which he maintained was for the immortality of his species. It was not the struggle for rights which death will ere long annihilate, but for rights which mortality cannot touch; "the right to feed upon immortal truth, to be divinely free, to soar and to anticipate the skies." How great is such an aim, how generous is such an effort! How it lifts a man from the dust to connect him with such a cause! The Apostle was at this time the intrepid and veteran defender of Christianity, and in that Christianity he perceived to be bound up all that is dear, and sacred, and important to man. After many years of anxious experiment; after the severest scrutiny to which he had applied it, under all the forms of conflict and of danger, he could still say, "I am not ashamed! I am little disposed to flinch before the frown which would awe it into silence, and thus compromise the happiness of the world. I know well the character and dignity of its blessed founder, and under that knowledge I have confided to him the never dying interests of my soul, in the full belief that ere long He will re-appear to

render finally triumphant the high cause of truth and righteousness in the earth."

But let us contemplate a little more minutely this avowal of the Apostle. It points out to our notice,

I. A DEPOSIT WHICH HE HAD MADE.

II. THE PERSON WITH WHOM HE HAD ENTRUSTED IT.

III. THE TIME WHEN HE EXPECTED TO RECEIVE IT AGAIN.

I. He speaks *first* of a deposit which he had made, "I am persuaded that he is able to *keep that which I have committed unto him.*" The expression is very general, but the nature of the subject renders it particular. It could be no *earthly* interest to which he alludes, for he knew that these were quickly passing away. The objects usually dear to mankind, such as wealth, reputation, power—these were possessions far too precarious to excite his anxiety. The great, the absorbing interest to which he ever bent his attention, was eternal happiness. "This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling which is in Christ Jesus." "To me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Such was the language which he was accustomed to employ, and when to this we add the

expression of another apostle, "Commit your souls unto God as unto a faithful Creator," we shall be at no loss to understand the nature of the deposit to which the apostle here refers. The interests of his soul,—his hopes and expectations for eternity,—his deliverance from guilt, and the enjoyment of God's eternal favour and friendship,—these comprised the amount of that trust which he had confided to God's care.

The expression, "*committed* unto him," denotes the anxiety of mind, the distinct and precise feeling with which he had made this deposit. It had not been a matter on which he had to the last hesitated—on which his affections had finally hung but in doubtful balance. It had been rather a matter on which his mind had been fully made up; on which his judgment had become mature, and which he had contemplated with indescribable solicitude. It was the care and anxiety of one, who having amassed his most precious possessions, wished to place them beyond the reach of peril.

Now these circumstances are well worthy of *our* attentive observation. The world and heaven, time and eternity, have the same relative value at present as in the days of the apostle. The one is as fleeting, the other as perpetual. Nor have the relations in which we

stand to them undergone any change. We are still connected with both worlds as directly and as certainly. Responsibility is still associated with the brevity of the one, and happiness or misery with the duration of the other. If then the apostle directed his deep and emphatic attention to the *legitimate* use of *this* world, and to the preparation for a *better*; and if he did this under the strong influence of a divine light we are surely called upon, if we value our eternity, to yield to the same interests the same sort of attention. It cannot be to us a matter of indifference whether or not these interests be provided for, or be left to extreme hazard. It is not here sufficient to reply, that every man has his own opinion, and that proselytism is not religion. It remains still a solemn and heart-stirring question, "Have I acted *seriously* upon this point—have I rendered to my eternal repose any thing like the justice of an effective and solicitous effort? Has eternity been with me a matter of heart-felt importance; and am I conscious of any distinct, honest, and abiding transaction between me and God? Can I say with sincerity and precision that I have *committed* the interests of my soul to God? That as a creature made by his power, and sustained by his providence, I feel my relation to Him to be near, incessant, and responsible? Do I value

his favour at a high price ? Do I seek my happiness, my honour, my dignity as a reasonable being, at his hand ? Does the habitual remembrance of God affect my mind and influence my actions ? Do the solemn events of death and of judgment to come associate themselves with all my notions of good and of evil ; or am I living at random as to these immortal interests ?”

It seems to be of the last importance to gain a specific impression on the mind as to this point. It ought to become a matter of direct and precise inquiry, whether or not any transaction is passing between God and the soul, similar to that alluded to by the apostles. Can I say that I have committed to God the care of my immortal welfare ? that I have surveyed my condition as a guilty, weak, and dying creature ? and that I have calmly and deliberately sought my refuge in Christ Jesus ? Have I shrunk before my own utter insufficiency to grapple with the possible events of eternity, and have I sought to hide me beneath the shield of God's omnipotence ? And no man can act thus, without a *consciousness* of this anxiety for the future. Such a communion with God, is the result of knowledge, of meditation, and of prayer. It argues a spiritual frame of mind, tenderly alive to its relation with God. It is the result of anxious enquiry as to the dangers to which we are exposed, and as to the value

of the possessions which we desire to have guarded. It is, under all these circumstances, a deliberate choice of God's protection; an acceptance, at once grateful and ardent, of his promised grace and mercy, through Jesus Christ. It is the cheerful confidence of faith in the full view of all the changes, and evils, and sins of life!

II. But in the SECOND PLACE, this deposit is made by the apostle with special reference to the CHARACTER OF THE SAVIOUR IN WHOSE CARE HE PLACED IT. "I KNOW whom I have believed, and I am persuaded HE IS ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED TO HIM!"

Faith in God's promises is a reasonable principle, not an enthusiastic sensation. We confide where we know that virtue, and power, and integrity, and goodness, prevail in the character upon which we wish to lean; and such scrutiny into character will be the more strict if the deposit we wish to make be very valuable. To confide in any one for eternity, requires a strong evidence of ability to sustain our interest. The world beyond us is unknown. It is vast and untravelled; while the results of the tribunal before which we must there stand, are in every respect gigantic and overwhelming. Now in reference to this awful future, the apostle 'confided in Jesus Christ.

He knew him—"I know whom I have believed;" I have not an equivocal conjectural confidence which the unfolding of future events may scatter to the winds. I know well the character of the person to whom I have confided the momentous interests of my eternity. I know him to be the Son of God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." I know him to be the atonement provided for human sin. I know him to be "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." I know him to have "the keys of death and the grave." I know him as the incessant voice of truth, which cries in the hearing of the wretched, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." If there be veracity in God; if the administration of the universe be in the hands of equity and of love, I know that I am safe. I know that the death and advocacy of Christ is a rock of adamant to my soul, from which no evolution of ages can force me away.

"I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." Ability to save arises from the union of goodness and of power. If the mind of a benefactor towards any object of suffering be kind, and his arm be strong, the relief he can impart is certain. Now Christ unites these qualities in his own person; "All power," he says, "in heaven and earth is given to me;" and "him that cometh

to me, I will in no wise cast out." This twofold declaration warrants the most entire confidence. He is thus fully able to guard what his servants commit to his care. The knowledge of his character is every thing as to this confidence. On the reality and on the efficacy of his mediation with God, they rest the whole weight of their expectations. They renounce this world as their heritage, and they anticipate in heaven a possession bought and secured to them by this munificent interposition of God. Such was the conduct, and such the anticipation of the apostle; "He *knew* in whom he had believed."

The knowledge of Jesus Christ has travelled down to our days, and will still transfer its blessing to the end of time. It will still be the strong asylum for a sinner's hope. It is there indeed alone that hope can find her proper nutriment. Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, is still the anchor to which she clings. If then the former question were important, "Have I committed the care of my soul to God," the present question is as important, "Have I done this as God requires me to do it, through the mediation of Jesus Christ?" Is He the channel to me of peace, of strength, and of confidence? Do I rely entirely upon the merits of his blood? Do I claim to be heard, pitied, ransomed, saved, on the ground

of his pouring out his soul as the sacrifice for human guilt and on this ground exclusively? Do I daily cultivate and cherish that train of thoughts, and feelings, and desires which correspond with the condition of a poor frail offender, who expects all his present and future happiness from the free kindness and rich love of God the Saviour? Do I know Jesus Christ as my advocate, my force, my confidence? Am I persuaded that he is able to uphold my interests and to support me through the trials of life? Am I persuaded that I may safely rest my dying head upon his promises, and go down into the grave cheered by the conviction "that because he lives I shall live also." Or do I rather trust to my own integrity, to my own kindness of heart, and to the indiscriminate and unauthorised mercy of God?

No man appears to have availed himself of the knowledge imparted by the Gospel dispensation, who does not know *wherefore* he is safe, or in what manner he can meet his God in peace. In Jesus Christ he is safe, because God has appointed Christ to be his mediator and advocate. "By this man, and through his name is remission of sins," authoritatively published to the world. But he who builds up another hope, in all probability will not be able to *sustain* that hope in eternity. Respectability, honour, kindliness of character, in reference to

man may not be adequate ground on which to stand before God. The esteemed citizen of earth may be very unfit for the purer realms of heaven. Oh let us beware of trusting *where* God teaches us to *despair*, or of refusing to trust where God commands us to *confide*. Happy, thrice happy is that man, who through a knowledge of Christ's work of reconciliation, has found the peace which nothing can disturb! He knows whom he believes. He advances along the pilgrimage of earth with firm and assured steps. He enters the valley of the shadow of death, and "fears no evil," not because no evils lurk there, but because the Son of God is his shield, his champion, and his guide!

III. But in making this distinct committal of his eternal interests to Jesus Christ, the apostle refers to a PERIOD WHEN THE FAITHFUL CARE OF HIS REDEEMER WOULD BE MORE ESPECIALLY MANIFESTED. "*I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.*" The apostle often speaks "of the day of the Lord;" "of the day of Christ's appearing:" and what day is this, but the final day of his triumph? "Behold he cometh, and every eye shall see him." "Whoso shall confess me before men, him will I also confess when I come in the glory of my Father and of his holy angels." It was needful that Christ should be

humiliated that he might expiate sin. Hence his kingdom was not of this world, was not composed of the elements of temporal grandeur. But he will not always remain under this apparent degradation. He will return to complete the victory which he hath achieved over sin, death, and hell. He will return to vindicate the cause of truth, and to render the dominion of godliness prevalent in the world. Then will his disciples share his triumph and partake his bliss. "Our conversation," says St. Paul, "is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change these vile bodies, and fashion them after his own glorious body, by that mighty working whereby he subdueth all things unto himself." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory."

These prospects cheered the heart of the apostle. The brightness of this day gleamed upon his hours of toil, of captivity, of bereavement. He lived by faith in God's assurances, and hence he was never ashamed of fidelity to this now despised cause. He habitually contemplated the moment when the number of Christ's followers would be complete; when the humble, and the pure, and the redeemed of every tongue, and kindred, and people would be contemporaries; when the wisdom of their

choice would become apparent; when *their* side would appear the *strong* side, and their Saviour would be recognised in the presence of triumphant multitudes as “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

But has the anticipation of the apostle ceased to be reasonable through the silent lapse of years? Has the flight of time shaken in any measure the purpose of God as to the final happiness of his servants? Has the glory of heaven wrought in the bosom of Christ any forgetfulness of the expectations which he has excited in his people? No; he will assuredly keep that which they have committed to him until or *against that day!* That day, so long desired by the aching eyes of thousands who sicken at the sins and sorrows of the world, will dawn at last! The sincere Christian of the present time confides in the approach of this final appearing of his Lord even as did the Christians of old! The hopes of the gospel descend from age to age. They are the patrimony of the righteous, and they fade not with the expectations of earth. What then are *our own* habitual anticipations as to this day? There are many whose ideas are completely obscure as to the future *revelation of Jesus Christ!* They have a certain indistinct notion of a day of judgment, of a day of separation,

between the righteous and the wicked ; but they care little to ascertain the nature of the decision or of the qualities of mind which in that day will be identified with happiness. Such it is to be feared live in a dreadful forgetfulness of the nature and end of Christ's mission to the world. Such are exclusively occupied with the cares, pleasures, sciences, profits of the present scene, and harmonize but little in their plans with the views and aim of him who came to purify a peculiar people, that he might be eternally glorified in their imitation of his holiness !

But how terrific will be the vision of eternity to those who have never sympathised with the wishes or clung to the promises of the Son of God ! What a fatal and dread discovery will such make, of the nakedness of irreligion, when the time to clothe themselves with the robe of redemption shall have for ever passed away ! Oh for the warning voice which might plead effectually God's cause in their bosoms, and awaken them from the dream of levity and of self-indulgence ! “ Awake, awake thou that sleepest in thy sins, and Christ shall give thee light.” “ Repent and believe the gospel.” Let us use the present moment. Let us seek the courage which belongs to wisdom—the courage which human ridicule cannot daunt, nor many inward conflicts destroy. Let us

dare to be on God's side. Let us pursue as the great end of life, the salvation of the soul. In a few fleeting years, all that now attracts our attention and beguiles our imagination will disappear. Death will introduce us to new scenes and new modes of existence. Let us be prepared for such a change. Let us live in the contemplation of eternity. Let us take pains to be happy, and make serious efforts to be safe. Let us dread the benumbing influence of continual society, and of dissipation of mind, which leaves no time, and robs the soul of all inclination, for solitary intercourse with God! Let us remember wherefore God has warned, wherefore Christ has died, wherefore the Spirit of God has urged. Let us not baffle the high and generous aim of the gospel. Let us not perish with all the means of grace, and all the invitations of love, and all the instruments of bliss within our reach! Let us read seriously, and deliberately, and habitually the sacred Scriptures, and abide by their everlasting decisions. Let us kneel with contrition of heart before the throne of God, pleading through the merits of Jesus Christ, that our strength may be the strength of Jehovah, and our hope the hope of the just!

But are there not some, who by the power of divine grace have felt much of the inward joy

and elevation which the prospect of eternity communicates to the redeemed? Are there not some who have already joined with the apostle in the strain of exultation, with which he looked onward to the future? Like him they *know* whom they have believed, and they often muse upon their approaching flight to his felicity. They have resolutely, though it may be with unequal steps, taken their part with his servants, and they are ready to abide the consequences of such a decision. They are ready to take up their cross, whatever be its weight; to face, if needful, the world's ridicule, and to seek their happiness in God's salvation. They have actually deposited their all in his hands, and their belief is that he will not betray their confidence.

He *will* not, he *cannot*. The promise lies unrepealed in both Testaments, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Let such endure and wait the result. They may be harassed by temptation, they may be assailed by poverty, they may be wounded in the dearest of earthly expectations, but they shall never be wounded where their true felicity is concerned. Oh let them live much in the thoughts of eternity, and break resolutely from every unholy shackle of the present world! Let them cleave closely by faith unto Christ,

and advance daily, if it be possible, some steps on the road to heaven! Let them renew again and again their confidence at the foot of the cross, and when flesh and heart fail, God shall be the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever!

SERMON III.

RELIGIOUS ANXIETY.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12.

“WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.”

It is deemed very uncharitable to decide upon the religious character of others, and without doubt great caution is here requisite, because we discern but a part of the character which we judge. But while our Saviour has said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” he has likewise said, “By their fruits ye shall know them,” and that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

The inner character of the mind is evidently discernible to God alone, and must be referred to his decision, but that decision is already recorded as to open acts of irreligion; no uncharitable judgment for instance, is passed upon *lips* which prophane God's holy name, if the Christianity of such a blasphemer be questioned. It is by the visible fruit that he is judged, nor is it the part of genuine charity to suppose in the face of opposing evidence, that

all is necessarily right between a man and his God. There is perhaps no greater practical cruelty than that unholy courtesy which labours to interpret that to be right which God has unequivocally pronounced to be wrong. A habit of exercising such false judgments seduces the understanding, and hardens the conscience. Hence springs the melancholy and fatal security of thousands, whom a habit of fair inquiry would warn of tremendous evils to be averted and of substantial blessings to be gained, but who are now reckless of the future, or buoyed up by its visionary expectations !

How different from such a security of mind is the caution urged by the apostle, “ Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” “ Pursue, that is, your inward cure, gain full evidence that God is healing your soul, and preparing you for the possession of real felicity. It may happen that the disease is yet unarrested, and that the affections of the heart are all disordered and defiled ! It may happen that no one feeling of solicitude ever yet exerted even a momentary influence upon the mind ! It may happen that up to this moment the most entire estrangement exists between God and your soul.” Let us now propose some test whereby to judge of religious anxiety. “ Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

It will be surely conceded that the honest

pursuit of any valuable object will be manifested by the unequivocal use of those instruments which are professedly given in order to secure its attainment; so that the real wish to attain it may be fairly doubted when those means are either wholly overlooked or very negligently employed. Now amidst many others which God has revealed for the healing or salvation of the diseased heart of man, three very palpable instruments of mercy may be found in the required use of the *Scriptures*, of *prayer*, and of the *Sabbath-day*.

Let an inquiry then be instituted into the *actual* use generally made of these means to salvation. The result of such an inquiry may prove very alarming to the condition of many, yet may such an alarm be medicinal and salutary!

I. Let us ask, in the first place, *What is the actual use which we make of the Scriptures?*

All our practical knowledge of God is comprised in the Bible, all that we can know of our Creator, of our relation to him, of his will, of his intentions concerning us, of our prospects after death, all such knowledge we derive from this source. The Bible then ought to be to us that which the chart and the compass are to the mariner on a stormy ocean; we have absolutely no other guide, no other directory to our course. In what light then do we prac-

tically regard the Bible? It is not enough to possess the Scriptures, to have been instructed out of the Scriptures in infancy, to hear them read in public worship, to have a general approbation of their contents. Would it be satisfactory to the mariner merely to possess a compass on board his vessel; to have received information as to its use in infancy, to admire its utility, or to discourse sometimes publicly of its merits? meanwhile he is driving on, it may be, to rocks, to shores, to sands, or quite away from his course. Must he not use his compass, must he not trace the bearings of his way, must he not have his eye attentively upon the needle?

But how many a man lives in this precise manner as to his use of the Scriptures. Day passes after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and God marks not his anxious eye pondering over this chart of life. Politics, science, poetry, history, it may be lighter productions, these can arrest his attention and interest his mind; but the Bible which notifies the way marks to eternity, this excites no interest. He knows and believes, or at least he professes to know and believe that God has kindly and plainly spoken to man in the volume of inspiration with which he is most imperfectly acquainted, yet he forbears to listen to those accents of truth. He

overlooks God's counsels; he prefers to these human wisdom, and even the suggestions of his *own* heart.

Is it true, or is it not, that men thus deal by the Bible? That they are contented to have heard, or occasionally still to catch from other lips the testimonies of eternal truth? And yet such persons perhaps expect God's favour—expect to reach the harbour of endless peace, and never even dream of the probability of intervening shipwreck! Mournful and inconsistent expectations! Is this to work out salvation “with fear and trembling;” is this to honour the statutes of the Sovereign of the universe; is this to value the counsels of a heavenly parent and benefactor; is this to betoken anxiety for the blessings of his great salvation?

Many, however, are to be found, who are by no means chargeable with this entire neglect of the Scriptures. Some have, from infancy, acquired regular habits of reading the Bible, and peruse as a daily, or at least as a weekly task, their allotted chapters. But they do this oftentimes without anxiety, and without progress in religious knowledge. The *fact* of reading is to them more important than the *contents* which they read. They manifest no submission of the heart to God's teaching—no godly diligence to lay up in the soul the statutes

and promises of the Lord. Eternity fastens not upon their thoughts—the wonders of redeeming love attract not their affections. They read with coldness, and languor, and unconcern. There is no inward solicitude whether they understand, whether they feel, whether they remember, whether they obey—whether or not that mighty record of truth dispel falsehood, and tear away sin from their souls. There is no scrutiny as to the effect of their knowledge—as to the conformity of their views, and sentiments, and habits with the decisions and intentions of God! There is no listening of the soul, no delight in the accents of God! The heart makes no progress in its voyage—it is no nearer to God—no nearer to the dispositions of heaven than it was many years ago. *

Think again of the mariner—his eye glances daily upon his compass—or once a week he fixes his look upon the needle; but he uses not the helm—he brings not the vessel into the prescribed course! As well then might the compass be cast into the depths of the sea! Now it is evident that this is not the use of the Scriptures which God demands—this is not to possess any anxiety as to the knowledge of God's will. Those who thus neglect, or thus imperfectly respect the Scriptures, are not among those who “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.”

II. Let us proceed to the second great source of strength and mercy opened to man “*the privilege of prayer to God:*” and let us observe in what manner we avail ourselves of this instrument of good. We delay not here to ask whether any persons live wholly without prayer whether there be any who depend in no measure upon God; who lie down at night, and go forth in the morning unconscious of any wish for divine protection, or of any need of divine mercy; who walk in the profound darkness of irreligion, and whose steps are uncheered by a single ray from heaven. If any such there be, their condition and their prospect may well call forth the deepest compassion! But it is to be feared that numbers are sadly ignorant of the nature and use of prayer, who yet occasionally, or even constantly engage in it. The force of educational habits is great, and the custom acquired in childhood stays by a man; and he still in maturer years periodically uses a form of prayer. A sense of weakness and a certain conscientious awe of God force upon his mind the idea of Providence, and he thinks it well not entirely to shut out God from his soul. Others go beyond this, and think prayer a decided duty; and under circumstances especially afflictive, they have a strong notion of dependence upon the goodness and care of the Supreme Being. But both classes of persons

now noticed appear to be greatly defective as to the *spirit* and *mode* of prayer. As to the *spirit*, they do not appear to be aware that prayer is the intercourse of affection and of confidence—the channel of divine mercy—and that it can exist only in the heart which delights and rejoices in God. It is a spiritual exercise which is the result of a holy state of the affections. It is the breathing forth of holy wishes and of generous aspirations—it is the actual approach of the soul to God. It will therefore be an intercourse with which other acts of the individual will harmonize. There will be a holy character, and a holy conduct, where prayer really is in exercise. When does a child have happy intercourse with a parent? it is when that child is loving and obedient. When does a child repose upon the wisdom and care of a parent? it is when the child values parental controul. When does a friend enjoy an interchange of fellowship with a friend? it is when kindred sentiments and tastes unite them to each other. It may confidently be asserted, that whatever may be the language adopted, no man really prays to God who does not love God. No man can justly pray whose affections are exclusively worldly, whose taste is depraved—whose actions are voluntarily hostile to the known precepts of God. Prayer, in such a case, may blind his conscience, but cannot heal his heart. God

accounts prayer a mockery, which is not the expression of love—the expression of contrition, of allegiance, of purity of intention, and of heavenly wishes. Does that person pray, to whom true godliness is perhaps a subject of ridicule? whose happiness is drawn from human objects exclusively—to whom Christ, and heaven, and salvation, are names which excite no sensation of desire in the soul!

These persons are defective also in the *mode* of prayer. They have little conception of the breach which sin has made between God and man. They have no sense of the evil of sin, or of the necessity of a Mediator between God and man. In their prayers they are unconscious that they have forfeited God's regard—that the way into his presence is closed, but as opened by Jesus Christ. Hence they think well of themselves, and seem to attach a notion even of merit to prayer; they call themselves virtuous and honest, and they anticipate God's approbation of their prayers. Alas they know not that prayer is the confession of a sinner—the cry for pardon—the breathing of a forlorn heart—the plea to be heard through the blood of the cross—the hope of faith in the intercession of Jesus Christ! Alas they know not that a genuine suppliant values at a high price the permission to cast himself before his God; and that he comes to the throne of his offended

Lord in prostration of his own merits, and with the publican's deep-felt acknowledgment, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Prayer is, in fact, that which the scriptures call "fellowship with God." It is the lively expression of love, and of confidence, and of union with God. It is intended of God to strengthen, and refresh, and recruit the spiritual faculties of the soul. It is in prayer that God enlightens, purifies, exalts, and consecrates the Christian to himself. And God never mentions the subject of prayer in the scriptures, but as the greatest of our privileges and our blessings. "When thou hast entered into thy closet, shut to the door, and pray to thy Father which seeth in secret." Thy *Father*, thy Benefactor, thy friend, thy Saviour! Oh solemn, and holy, and affectionate, and free, be thy intercourse with such a Being!

Hast thou to do with him who loved thee to the death, who bled on the cross for thy eternal peace, and who lives to intercede for thy interests? And will he call that proffered language prayer, which comes forth periodically from lips untouched by heaven's fire, and from a heart yet devoted to time, to sense, to earth! It cannot be, "God is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him, in spirit and in truth."

Can he then be said "to work out his own

salvation with fear and trembling," who values prayer at so poor a price—who finds in it no holy enjoyment—who is soon wearied—who brings no cordiality to the exercise—who is in no alarm as to his spiritual condition—who sees no evil in the inroads which the intercourse of the world makes upon his conscience—and whose prayers are therefore the same to-day as yesterday; the same cold, dull, dead offering of words which convey little meaning, and draw forth no sympathy in his soul! Such an one never exemplifies the precept of the text!

III. Let us briefly now touch upon the third great instrument of spiritual improvement, the use of the *sabbath-day*. And let us mark in what manner this is actually employed. The institution of the sabbath is one of the most decided tokens of God's care for man. Sin produced the sad necessity for incessant labour in the general framework of human society; a necessity, under existing circumstances, most favourable to social welfare; but to cheer the hopelessness of toil, and to guard against the moral evil of being thus occupied in the things of earth, God gave a day of repose, and a day of spiritual employment. He said, "rest from your work, and remember me; consecrate your time as well as your heart to me on this day, and you shall meet the labours of life with safety and with comfort."

What a blessing to an ignorant, what a spiritual succour to a sensual world ! But how is it regarded ? As a day of rest to the poor, the artisan, the tradesman, certainly in very many cases the relief is valued and used. But how is it used by the rich ? Of these, numbers make no effort to consecrate it to God ; the duties of public worship are by them wholly neglected ; their ordinary amusements suffer no check ; the employment of their hours knows of no alteration ; God's institution is utterly and deliberately despised. Religion has no charms for them ; “ They are without God in the world.” “ Oh that they knew the day of their visitation ;” while yet the door of mercy is unclosed against them !

But many certainly attend public worship on the sabbath ; many make it a matter of duty thus far to remember to keep the sabbath-day holy ; yet their conduct during the remainder of the day evinces that they have no anxiety for spiritual improvement ; that they are by no means eager to guard themselves against the seductive influences of the world ; and that it little enters into their notion of evil to efface every solemn impression by the frivolities of life !

How vain is sabbath prayer and sabbath instruction to that person, who ere the sounds of religion have well died upon his ear, hurries

to scenes of amusement and of levity, and passes the hallowed evening of God's day in publicity and idle mirth! We speak here of the inconsistency between such a *religious exercise* and such an *irreligious society*. Is there any holy anxiety for the progress of the soul in godliness under such circumstances? Is the sabbath-day productive of the end for which it was given when thus employed? is not divine worship a mockery, if the heart be not offered? and if the heart were offered, would there not be a harmony in the conduct? Should we thus build up with one hand that fabric of sensations and of affections which we seem to wish to destroy with the other? Rather have we not reason to suspect ourselves of hypocrisy, and of ungodliness, who can cast off in a few moments the solemnity of the sanctuary, and rush with unholy heart into all the giddy and enslaving customs of the world! The sabbath-day is, in truth, widely profaned; it is not used as by those, who knowing the depravity of their nature, and dreading their exposure to the malignant agency of evil, "work out their salvation with fear and trembling."

But it may be said, if not thus profaned, the sabbath would be to men a day of gloom and of dreariness! alas it would! and why? Simply because the heart is uninterested—the affections are untouched by religion. It is a

yoke, a bondage, a **salvo to conscience**, a bribe that would fain hush every voice of **eternity** to rest. Hence, to get rid of this yoke, to pay this bribe as cheaply as possible, is essential to tranquillity! What a mournful confession is this!

And here may we not discern the true source of the outcry against what is called, with very little intelligence in those who use the term, methodism, or real godliness. Sincere Christians ask for a spiritual religion, for the service of the heart, for the love of God, for attachment to Jesus Christ, for consistent conduct, and for pure and holy affections. Men have not those qualities to give, and hence they cry down the gift if any others wish to yield it.

They tolerate religion as far as it trenches not upon the ordinary pleasures and profits of life; but when it asks for any sacrifice of these, it is calumniated and maligned. And its demands must be silenced, lest the merchandize of mirth should be diminished! But shall this unholy calumny be approved? shall this calumny prove habitually satisfactory to us as reasonable and intelligent beings standing on the brink of eternity?

Travelling to the tribunal of Christ, shall we misal that pleasure which disqualifies the soul for that last and terrific scrutiny; shall we misal that happiness which can bring no conso-

lation in the hour of death, and can send forward no cheering anticipations into a brighter scene! Strange folly and insensibility of mind! Surely time, circumstances, events speak aloud and tell us of a wiser counsel!

All here is fleeting and insecure; death strikes when we think not. Youth is no barrier against its seizure. The man strong to-day lies cold in the grave to-morrow. Oh for that state of mind! Oh for those affections with which death and eternity are strongly and directly associated! Happy alone is he whose soul is healed, whose reconciliation with God is felt, whose hope is firm, whose spiritual discipline is in lively and healthful exercise, and whose joy shall abide for ever! "Let me live the life of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

SERMON IV.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 16, 17.

“NOW OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, AND GOD EVEN OUR FATHER WHICH HATH LOVED US, AND GIVEN US EVERLASTING CONSOLATION, AND A GOOD HOPE THROUGH GRACE, COMFORT YOUR HEARTS, AND STABLISH YOU IN EVERY GOOD WORD AND WORK.”

ALTHOUGH the real opposition to godliness lies in the alienation of the affections from God, there are undoubtedly many accompanying circumstances which perpetuate and augment that alienation. Among these may be noticed ignorance of the true character and intentions of God, in that revelation of his will which he has deigned to make. It is not conceivable, that if God were known he would not be loved, and his favour be preferred to the friendship of every other being. Men form to themselves false notions of religion, and then denounce its requisitions as burdensome and unsuitable to the current events and propensities of society. There are few men who do not connect with the notions of strict religion something cold, re-

pulsive, and monastic—something which sheds a chill over the warmth of domestic and social life. Many take their views of Christianity from systems of theology, or from the *negative practices* of those who are denominated religious. But this is a great evil; the Scriptures themselves are the only legitimate interpreters of the divine will: were these honestly and perseveringly studied, how different would be the impression stamped upon the mind! If there be an object calculated to arrest and interest man, it is surely the scriptural character of his God! If there be any sympathy with what is great, and generous, and beautiful, and good—if there be any intuitive recoil from what is dark and destructive—if there be any desire for protection, rest, and joy, then is Christianity precisely adapted to the wants and aspirations of the human heart! “Acquaint thyself with God,” saith Job, “and be at peace. Judge not of God,” that is, “by a portion of his laws, but judge of him by the harmony of his actions, and by the tendency and design of all his institutions, and you shall have rest.”

But the passage of Scripture selected as the text, is yet more strikingly illustrative of this subject. Let any man weigh the character of God as it is here briefly delineated, and then let him say, if he can find in all the varied contemplations of nature, science, art, or friend-

ship, any object so directly suited to engage the whole force of his sympathy and affection. The apostle spoke under immediate inspiration, and he thus describes God, “He is not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” but in Him “likewise our Father;” and as our Father, “He hath loved us, and he has given us everlasting consolation, and a good hope through grace:” and his direct design in the manifestation of this grace, is “to comfort our hearts, and to establish us in every good word and work.”

Can language more emphatically express a character of beneficent compassion? Can imagination furnish an object of higher attraction and sympathy? It may fairly be replied, that it cannot. Why do we then withhold our veneration and affection from such a Benefactor? It is most unreasonable, but we know him not as *such*, we ponder not his kindly attributes, and we are entombed in the blandishments of sense!

Let the present half hour be employed in the attempt,

I. IN THE FIRST PLACE, TO ILLUSTRATE THIS CHARACTER OF GOD, AND THEREBY

II. IN THE SECOND PLACE, TO ENFORCE HIS DESIGN TO PROMOTE HUMAN HAPPINESS.

1st. The character of God is evidently comprised in the language of the text: “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “God, even our Father,

who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and a good hope through grace.” The use of the term *Father*, is in itself in a very high degree, significant of the mind of God towards mankind. We attach the strongest notion of anxiety, sympathy, and affection, to those parental instincts with which God has endowed our nature. Hence in adopting this term *Father*, he refers at once to the feelings with which he has made us familiar, and which afford great encouragement to us to regard him with respect and gratitude. Our Saviour uses the same epithet, when he teaches us to pray. He directs us to address ourselves as to our Parent and our Friend. Were this relation a matter of mere conjecture, adopted by the eager wish of those who feel their weakness, and who take shelter from this weakness in the notion of a paternal providence, it were less remarkable. But when expressed as the matter of a direct revelation, it gives instantly an aspect the most pleasing and attractive to the idea of God. What may we not expect from a Being, who to unlimited power, adds the warmth and tenderness of a Father? How strange, that we should shrink from intercourse with such a Being: that we should imagine the qualities of other creatures to be more rich in their capacity to yield enjoyments than are his parental attributes!

It belongs to such a character to manifest love; "God is love." "He hath loved us." Every pleasing quality, every natural form of beauty, every ornamental moral sentiment with which we are acquainted, is but a type or reflection of the same in the mind of God. The whole series of created beauties are but the multiplied analogies or illustrations of the attributes of the Deity. "He hath loved us." Whence it may be asked the capacity to love each other, except it be derived from God? There is in the bosom of God the principle of an inexhaustible sympathy and compassion. How feeble an illustration of the ocean is the deepest and mightiest river—and how feeble an illustration of the divine love is the warmest throb of tenderness which ever shot through a human heart! "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb?—She may forget yet will I not forget thee." "He hath loved us." He hath endowed us with high and fruitful faculties; he created us in his image, and formed us for his own companionship. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

But the highest manifestation of this love is contained in the efforts made to withdraw us from the misery into which our folly has plunged us. "He hath given us everlasting consola-

tion.” The expression carries back our minds to the pressure of some existing wretchedness. Consolation is opposed to sorrow; and our Lord refers to this discovery of divine compassion, when he said, “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso believeth in him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life.”

In the absence of revelation, the world wondered at its own complexion and destiny. Conscience was evermore overborne by passion, and misery was the result. Death at the same time snapt asunder the closest ties, and the creature apparently made to exercise dominion over this lower world, was in fact the utter sport of circumstances, and the victim of disease, conflict, and destruction. Revelation has disclosed the mystery: “ God made man upright; but he has sought out many inventions.” He transgressed the law under which he was held to allegiance, and forfeited not only his right to happiness, but to existence. “ In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The consolation mentioned in the text has reference to the clemency and interposition of God under these circumstances of rebellion and of forfeiture. After a period of time abundantly adequate to mark out the essential misery of sin, and the impotence of man to rescue himself from the degradation to which he had

sunk, God sent forth his Son, to assume our nature, and to carry in that nature the burden of our griefs. The object of this mission was twofold—to mark God’s abhorrence of disaffection to his government, and at the same time to win back the affections of those who had rebelled. The personal sufferings of Jesus Christ are calculated to ensure this twofold result. Can it be questioned that God attaches an inconceivable turpitude to the alienation of the affections from his government, when he sent Jesus Christ to suffer shame and death on account of that sin? Can it be questioned, that indifference to the honour and glory of the supreme lawgiver, is an actual insult to his authority, destructive of happiness to its possessor, when Jesus Christ came by “his own stripes to heal” the disease of those who had “come short of the glory of God.” Or can any exhibition of *clemency* and *tenderness* be imagined equal to that which the cross of Christ has pourtrayed? How ardent must be that desire to retrieve the ruined peace of man, which could induce the Lawgiver to rest the burden of expiation upon his own Son! Let any man contemplate the holy character and the unlimited power of Christ, let him contemplate the voluntary degradation to which he stooped, and the trials to which he submitted, and let him ask, whether the love manifested in such a

transaction be not utterly beyond conception? Does not a series of such actions justify the declaration that "God *so* loved the world." And the *discovery* of this love is surely calculated to win back confidence, and affection, and allegiance. It is conceded that this result is in every case in which it takes place, the operation of the special grace of God, but still that grace acts in a reasonable manner. The *discovery* of this love is the instrument by which God regains his ultimate hold upon the human affections.

"The consolation" thus expressed in this act of atonement, and of intercession is surely worthy of God to bestow. It extends to an ultimate repeal of every penalty,—to the gift of a new life—to the remission of offences—to the renewal of parental intercourse—to the tranquillizing the conscience—to the establishment of peace between the propensities and the judgment, by presenting to the heart God as the first and supreme object of veneration and of love! Such a gift deserves the name of "consolation." Nor is this remedy for human misery a delusive or transient blessing. "It is everlasting," its full development requires the existence of a higher scene. Here it imparts peace, hope, and security; here it fills up the blank which earth leaves ever void; here it draws out the sting

from death, and places again the soul in contact with the riches of God's friendship in Jesus Christ. But it is amidst the blessedness of eternity, that it will unfold the full extent of its consolation, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me shall never die." With what astonishment will a rescued sinner on the morning of the resurrection contemplate his situation, and the means by which that situation has been rendered happy and eternal! In the actual presence of his great Redeemer, in the society of spirits made perfect, and in a world of righteousness he will wake to a felicity such as "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, but which God hath prepared for them that love him." And the circumstance which will augment wonderfully the impression of this felicity upon his mind is *its eternal duration*. On earth he was painfully familiar with the operation of decay; in a restored paradise this principle is not allowed to enter. There mortality is swallowed up of life, God has in fact bound up this rescued life with his own eternity. "Because I live ye shall live also; so shall we be ever with the Lord."

As ages roll away, additional testimony will be continually afforded to the veracity of the promise, and to the fulness and sufficiency of

the blessing. The imperfect description of this eternal consolation exhausts the power of human imagery to give it even a prophetic existence, what then will be the reality? Let any man fairly ponder the concluding pages of the Apocalypse, and he will be overwhelmed with the conceptions of honour, purity, and felicity which there crowd in upon the imagination. And the time is at hand, when the scenes of prophecy will become the scenes of actual accomplishment. The apostle therefore connects with this part of the munificent character of God, his gift of "a good hope through grace." And it is evident that the scheme of mercy would fail if it were not made the subject of a present revelation. If the future good had been concealed, the healing operation of *Hope* upon the heart would have been thwarted, and the consolation intended had proved wholly ineffectual; "We are saved, that is, healed," says the apostle, "by hope;" "There is mercy with thee, that thou mayest be feared." While therefore, eternity remains concealed as a matter of curiosity, as the source of hope it is fully and clearly revealed. The resurrection from the grave, as the appearing of Jesus Christ, to a reunion with the pious dead in the presence of Christ, and in a world and climate of perpetual health and joy, is a matter

of distinct revelation which no candid interpreter can for a moment doubt. It is as plain, as distinct assurances can make it. Future felicity became, therefore, immediately the subject of hope—of a hope as palpable, though far more certain, than the hope which enables the exile from his native land to toil for the future moment, which is to restore him to his family, with the wealth essential to promote their comfort. The certainty of this hope justifies the epithet “good”; it is in fact the only “hope which makes not ashamed.”

On earth the fairest prospect may in a moment be overclouded, the most favourable appearance may in a moment change its aspect, and the storm which supervenes may be as unexpected as it is violent and destructive. He who has collected in his memory facts illustrative of the condition of man, will be often startled at the fragile thread by which his comforts are retained; he will sometimes hear the accents which attest the friendship of those dear to him, as perhaps the last which precede the stillness of death. He will recollect that the fairest flower often withers ere its loveliness has unfolded all its symmetry. But when his enriched imagination ranges through the high objects of eternity, it never thus falls back upon itself defeated or alarmed. It finds ground upon which conti-

nually, and with safety, to advance. God has intended to make man happy, and hence has placed his felicity beyond the controul and reach of evil or hazard. The final heritage of the redeemed is depicted as incorruptible, and unfading, reserved in heaven, and those for whom it is thus reserved are delineated as themselves “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” It is this certainty which gives to religious hopes all their value. The excursive mind ranges this future scene with the warm assurance that the reality will infinitely surpass every possible anticipation. Nor is this all, this hope is “*through grace*,” that is, the whole benefit is conferred by God, the entire amount of this everlasting consolation is unmerited. It is offered and imparted *freely*; it is bought “without money and without price.” Pardon, restoration to life, the faculties and occasions of felicity, the hopes of eternal intercourse with the holiest and happiest society, victory over death and the grave, deliverance from the slavery and degradation of sin, all these are gratuitous acts of kindness—the result of a love which has lived through rebellion and ingratitude, which has triumphed over every provocation, and which will be the highest theme of admiration through eternal ages. And as the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the great manifestation of

all this love, the apostle has prefaced this delineation of the divine character by the expression, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself comfort you." This consolation, this hope is nothing less than God manifested in the flesh, that he might rescue, redeem, and save. It is "in the face of Jesus Christ that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God emphatically shines." It is Christ crucified, risen, and ascended, which constitutes "the hope of glory." "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and ye are complete in him." "For he, of God, is made unto you wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption," that he that glorieth, or is happy, may so glory in the Lord.

II. Such is the view given to us in these words of the true character of God, and of the relation into which his munificent love has placed us. But the apostle leaves not the subject at this point, but goes on to mark THE INTENDED OPERATION OF ALL THIS KINDNESS UPON THOSE TO WHOM THE GREAT SUBJECT OF JOY HAD BEEN THUS REVEALED. This God, this Saviour, "comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." God's object is to comfort you, to solace your affliction, to sustain your weakness, to pardon your guilt, to renew the holy impress of himself upon your hearts—to bring you back from destruction

and to provide you with a home replete with every possible image of delight. This is his object. He has secured the rights of his own government in the sufferings of his Son, and he is enabled to bring forth to you these assurances of paternal mercy unclogged by a single drawback which might result from your previous character. His business now is with the guilty and the sad. The happy and the perfect inhabit other worlds. The sick, the polluted, the dying inhabit this. Therefore Christ came, and, therefore, his voice was heard in language thus appropriate, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee;" "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions;" "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" "Hence, I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Here is comfort wide as human misery! Here is medicine efficient to heal the most inveterate disease. Here is remittance for the largest debt. For what is the ulterior design with which this magnificent plan of kindness is presented to our minds, and this comfort poured into our hearts? It is to establish us in every "good word and work." Rebellion is continual where the case is hopeless. Clemency and pardon create a blush, and inflict a pang of self-reproach. The remitted penalty

will excite to future allegiance. This is the judgment of mankind, "There were two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, the other fifty, and when they had nothing to pay, their creditor frankly forgave them both. Tell me which loves him most? I suppose he to whom he forgave most; Thou hast answered right." Such was the recorded opinion of the Pharisee, and such the approbation of that opinion from the lips of him who knows what is in man, and who can fully judge of the influence of every moral principle upon his perplexed and diseased heart.

We see then the full end to which the knowledge of God's unmerited mercy is designed to lead. It is to *comfort* in order to bring back to obedience. It is to *heal* in order to consecrate the restored faculties to the service of him who gave them. It is to multiply before man proofs of kindness, in order to melt down his hostility. It is to correct his deluded estimate of good and evil, to force him alike by the arguments of religion and by the sensations of gratitude from his worldliness and his sins, and to bring him back as the conscious prodigal to lodge his cares, sorrows, weaknesses, anxieties and fears in the bosom of his father and his friend.

What then is faith in God's mercy, but the conviction that sin is poison, and immorality

destruction: what is it but the strong and deep perception that in God alone there is felicity, and truth, and life! What but the love of every good word and work, the devotedness of the whole character to the will and wishes, and designs of God?

And shall *we* withhold our attention from this theme of compassion and grace? Shall *we* refuse to connect together henceforth the ideas of happiness and holiness? Shall we not acquaint ourselves with God and thus seize the proffered felicity of his children. Soon, very soon, earthly possessions will fail to protect our peace. Soon the wrench of death will tear up our roots from earth! Oh to be so torn up in order to be transplanted into the paradise of God! Let us not deem social enjoyments, the pursuits of science, or the dreams of pleasure to be the only sources of felicity. Let us rather seek that felicity in the acceptance of mercy, in the friendship of God, in the calm of hope, in the confidence of faith, in the expansion of a charity which rejoices in the truth! Let us seek it in the recovery of spiritual health, in the warmth of gratitude, and in the anticipations of eternity!

SERMON V.

HOLINESS THE DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL.

TITUS ii. 11—14.

“FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION HATH APPEARED UNTO ALL MEN, TEACHING US THAT DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS, WE SHOULD LIVE SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLILY IN THIS PRESENT WORLD, LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PECULIAR PEOPLE ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.”

IN the search after happiness, no man is ultimately successful but the true Christian. The elements of earthly prosperity are confessedly inadequate to impart tranquillity to the mind. Man was formed for God, and none but God can render him happy. He is however so greatly the bond-slave of passion, or the victim of prejudice, or the prey of delusion, that nothing is so difficult as to bring him into that just knowledge of God from which alone this felicity can proceed. If in some measure ac-

quainted with revelation, he often mars its symmetry, he deceives himself by an attachment to some of its statements, while he neglects others, and thus he continues more or less amidst his sorrows and in his sins. In almost every error there is a portion of truth, and this renders error doubly dangerous. Thus some men acquainted with the preceptive parts of Christianity, and observant of the good effects of these precepts upon human society, place the whole essential of religion in the fulfilment of relative duties. Other men, arrested by the assurances of mercy and of grace with which the scriptures abound, and satisfied that their own conduct is very defective, separate this grace from the design with which it is imparted, and rely upon an arbitrary and indiscriminate exercise of kindness on the part of God. Now it is evident that both these classes of persons are in part wrong, and in part right. The precepts of God as well as his promises, are portions of his revelation. In the approval of these they are respectively right, but they are both mistaken as to their full estimate of Christianity. They both misunderstand the true character of God, and deface the harmony of his revealed will. They both are ignorant of the design of the gospel, which is to redeem man from iniquity by exhibiting to him its deformity, and to allure him to godliness by the

manifestation of its direct connection with his happiness. It is to present to his affections holy objects, that his conduct may become pure, for the stream will ever partake of the qualities of its source. Make a man *love* God, and he will *love* his fellow-creatures. Let but God have the heart, and all the lovely regulations of domestic, social, and national virtue will necessarily ensue. God is holy, just, and good, and they that truly love God will certainly imitate his holiness and his justice. Hence the contest between the abettors of faith and those of works is painful and unfortunate. Those who set up faith seem not in fact to understand the nature of faith. They contend for certain notions, ignorant of *the moral interpretation of those notions*, while those who set up works understand not the real nature of morality, or its necessary connection with the will and service of God. How well would it be if both classes of combatants would cease from this vain struggle, would commune with their own hearts, and fairly search out the character of God that they might become conformed to his image! How soon would both parties meet on the common ground of acquaintance with him who can alone constitute their honour, security, and happiness. Very justly has the author of the "Night Thoughts" expressed this truth in these striking words,

“Talk they of morals! Oh thou bleeding love,
 ‘Thou teacher of new morals to mankind,
 The grand morality is love to thee.”

What is our notion of *heaven*, but the full allegiance of holy love? The earth would even now be its type, if this love were triumphant in the human heart. You might bid farewell to statute books, and penalties, and bolts, and bars, and hulks, and prisons, were this principle operative and harmonious in its influences upon the soul. A willing love cannot inflict a willing injury. Now it is the precise design of Christianity to exhibit God as an object so attractive, as to enthrone him in our affections, and being thus enthroned in our affections, to make him also the object of our incessant imitation. It is to make us *godly* in order to make us *moral*, in other words, it is to make us love God, in order that we may love each other. It is to cast out from our bosoms the plan of an ungenerous and polluted selfishness, and to make us peaceful and happy in the pursuit and enjoyment of charity and truth!

The *grace* of God can never therefore, without injustice to its nature, be separated from the *holiness* of God. The conflict of faith and works is thus the conflict of the ignorant, and the source of unspeakable injury to mankind!

Now the passage of scripture before us exhibits the symmetry of revelation, as empha-

tically and as lucidly as any passage to be met with in the sacred scriptures. It tells us that the very object of all God's grace and kindness is to redeem us from iniquity. It is to show us God's justice, that we may ourselves become just. It is to manifest to us God's love, in order that we may ourselves become lovely. It is to extricate us from the dreadful predicament which comprises all the elements of wretchedness, of approving one thing and of pursuing another. It is to give God at once the throne of the judgment and of the inclination, and thus to reconcile the eternally jarring interests of the human system! And there is no other intelligible mode of making man happy.

Thus after several thousand vain years of intellectual and of physical effort, after reiterated trials in which it abundantly appeared, that man by his own wisdom knew not God. "It pleased God," says the same apostle, "by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe." "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all

iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

The words of the text suggest to us three distinct particulars.

I. THE APPEARING OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

II. THE LESSON WHICH IT WAS INTENDED TO TEACH, AND

III. THE ATTITUDE AND CONDITION OF MIND WHICH IT WAS INTENDED TO PRODUCE.

I. The first point, or the manifestation of the grace of God, we in fact considered in a preceding discourse; we there adverted to that display of mercy and compassion which constitutes God's paternal character, and which led to the most costly acts of love, from which have flowed down to sinners “everlasting consolation and a good or assured hope of eternal felicity.” Upon this part of the subject, therefore, no remarks will at present be offered; but our attention will be called rather to the second point,

II. *The lesson which the kindness of God is intended to teach.* “The grace of God,” says the apostle, “that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, *teaching* us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,” since “Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

Now let it be observed, that the apostle is not here speaking of the preceptive parts of Christianity, but of the *grace* of God as *teaching* this lesson of self-denial and of holiness. The observation of this fact will, in itself, evince to us the absurdity of separating the doctrines from the commands of scripture, or of acceding to the belief of certain facts, without at the same time believing the *moral interpretation* of those facts. The facts of Christianity are in truth visible exemplifications of its precepts, and he does not properly believe the facts who does not believe their interpretation, nor can he reasonably be said to believe the interpretation who does not receive upon his mind the moral impression which that interpretation contains. In reality the quantity of that moral impression is the just measure of his belief of the fact itself. The apostle then declares that the kindness or grace of God teaches us the mortification of sin and the value and beauty of holiness. For what is the nature of this manifestation of kindness! Is it not God freely pardoning sin in a manner which marks out his utmost *abhorrence* of sin? The door of hope was shut against man. God surveyed his own moral rights as governor of the world, He knew that mankind had trifled with his authority and had realised the terrific mistake that the external senses could yield him a higher

felicity than his God could impart. God would teach him that the transgression of the law under which he had been created was connected with essential misery. Hence the mysterious transaction of the expiatory sufferings of Jesus Christ. We say that Jesus Christ died for man ; what do we mean by the belief of this fact ? Do we not mean that sin exposes man to misery, and that when God would arise to pardon, it was through this very manifestation of its misery ? And what is the inference which the fact of Christ's humiliation alone justifies ? Is it not that the ultimate wages of rebellion is nothing less than the perdition of our being ? Yet at the same moment what an exhibition of immeasurable kindness ! It were difficult to say which of these two inferences rises to the most perspicuous height from the view of the cross, that God is love, or that God is holiness.

Both these attributes of love and truth are here embodied in one astonishing fact, viz. God manifest in the flesh, and dying for the recovery of his creature's happiness. Faith in this fact, is therefore faith in the doctrine that sin exposes to inconceivable misery. Strange perversion of the meaning of this fact when any man looks upon the doctrine of grace and atonement, in order to rescue himself from the pressure of moral obligation ! If there be any pos-

sible fact, any possible argument which can speak as with accents of thunder against the slightest infringement of God's law, it is surely this very fact and doctrine of the expiatory affliction of the Son of God! At the same time it does not speak simply to the understanding as any direct and rigid precept of philosophy might speak, but it speaks at once to all the faculties of the mind, and to all the sympathies of the heart. It sets before the transgressor the justice and holiness of his Maker with such an accompanying expression of unutterable pity, patience, generosity, and love, as would win him back to allegiance; less through his *fears* than through his *hopes*, as would melt down the ruggedness of his spirit, irritated perhaps by the erroneous views he had entertained of the divine character, and once more reveal to him the true sources of his felicity in the revival of every grateful sentiment and affection towards his benefactor, his father, and his God! We repeat, then, that the lesson of the cross, the lesson of God's ineffable kindness is "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." The term "godly" refers to the hidden principles of all moral obedience, love, or veneration for God; a principle which alone gives the character of liberty to his service. The obedience of a slave is not the obedience of virtue but of necessity: the obedience

God seeks is that of virtue, as a father he claims gratitude and love, and what an argument for the production of this love is the pacification of the cross! The term "righteously" refers to the relative acts of justice and charity towards our fellow-creatures. And what an argument for this justice and this charity, is this same fact of atonement! Who can reasonably condemn the rights of truth and justice, with the spectacle before his eyes of Christ enduring the malediction of the law on account of man's infringement of these very rights? Or how can any man esteem lightly the claims of generosity and love towards his neighbour, with this scene presented to his view of God yielding up to death his beloved Son in behalf of others, and these not friends but foes? Is it too much to say that if not a single precept of justice or of benevolence existed in the scriptures, but if God had spoken to man simply by this fact of atonement, the moral lesson would itself be irresistible, if its fair interpretation were duly considered? But when viewed in accordance with multiplied commandments to the practice of truth and charity, a combined character of beauty, mercy, and holiness, is stamped upon God's revelation, calculated in the highest possible degree to win the attention, and to secure the affections of mankind to the practice of an unreserved morality.

The term "soberly" refers to that quality

of mind which results from a comparison between the value of things temporal and things eternal, things outward or sensual, and things inward or spiritual. The scriptures have elsewhere spoken of “inordinate affection,” and have given the directions, “Let your moderation be known unto all men;” “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth;” “for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” “When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory!”

Now what an argument to this heavenly sobriety of mind flows from the discovery of God’s kindness in the cross of Christ. He came to the world in humility, in suffering, in self-denial, in conflict, in death! He had no part in the struggles of ambition, in the pursuit of riches, in the gratifications of sense, in the attainment of rank and power! What was his life, what was his death, but the unfaltering statement, “that all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass.” “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, while the word and promises of God alone abide for ever.” Let it be admitted that the Scriptures authorise a wise, and humble, and moderate enjoyment of the temporal emoluments of life, but if they went farther, it would be to ruin the very cause which they intend to sustain. It

would be to secularise the hearts which they desire to render heavenly, it would be to root deeper in the soil that which is ere long to be torn up by the violence of death ; it would be to build as a resting-place the structure which the winds and the floods are soon to crumble and to destroy. Oh ! how wise is it for a pilgrim and a stranger to dwell ever in the prospect of his home and of his family, and to forego unnatural attachments to the objects scattered in the wilderness through which he is to pass !

It is evident, that if the lesson taught by the doctrines of grace be thus to live “ godly,” “ righteously,” and “ soberly,” in this present world, there will follow an absolute denial of “ ungodliness and worldly lusts,” as incompatible with this life of Christian justice and moderation. These qualities of mind are easily injured, and with difficulty cherished and maintained amidst the temptations of life : they are destroyed by ungodliness, and the prevalence of worldly lusts. Two opposite propensities cannot exist habitually and supremely in the same bosom. “ The friendship of the world is enmity with God.” “ No man can serve two masters” of opposite dispositions ; a godly man cannot be ungodly ; a righteous man unjust ; a sober man immoderate. We speak of habit, and design, and mode of life. There may be an occasional conflict of principle, there may be

sad inconsistencies, resisted, and painfully felt and acknowledged, but the character of virtue will maintain its supremacy, and the transgression will be the bitterly deplored exception, and not the rule. The mists of sense and of earth, like those of the morning struggling with the summer sunbeams, will gradually disperse, and the character will hourly brighten into the firmer and steadier love of righteousness and peace. Such is the lesson which the free, sovereign, unmerited mercy and grace of God in Christ Jesus is intended to teach. It writes in characters of blood the connection between guilt and misery. It warns a man by the agonies of Christ, to turn his feet from the paths of evil: it invites a man by the same mysterious sorrows, to look again towards the God whom he had quitted, and to lean again his heart and his hopes upon the bosom of his Saviour and his Friend.

II. But it remains yet briefly to notice the *attitude of mind which this manifestation of God's kindness* is designed to produce: "Looking," says the apostle, "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ."

What is the aim and design of this new life of faith and charity, this culture of sobriety, justice, and godliness? Is it not to train the soul for a higher existence, to expand its faculties in the light and love of truth? Is it not to

heal the polluting and aching diseases of the heart? Is it not to discipline the character into the imitation of God, and to render the individual meet for the enjoyment of the inheritance of the saints in light?" Is it not to prepare him for the day of final triumph and bliss, when he shall see his Saviour face to face, and live in his pure society, through the bright ages of eternity?

Now all this discipline, all this culture of moral principles, all this practice of virtue, is carried on under the guidance and vivacity of hope. "Ye are saved by hope." Christianity in a renewed mind, is any thing but a cold and reluctant obedience extorted by terror: it is the voluntary submission of the heart to the wisest and kindest friend. It is the free and high anticipation of everlasting felicity in his presence. "*Looking* for that blessed hope;" his eyes are fixed upon it; his interests are comprised in its veracity; his affections are embarked in its accomplishment. The world is not his home, nor its enjoyments adequate to sustain his peace. This scene is fading and defiled: its snares are many; its paths are rugged; its sorrows are frequent. His feelings are those of an exile, who amidst various comforts still thinks of his home, his country, and his friends. The hope of his return gilds the intermediate hours of his existence; he fulfils

his duty, he refreshes his spirit by the objects of beauty or of interest around him, but his affections cling round his native shores. To that unforgotten scene the needle of his heart hourly tends. Thus is it with the Christian on whom the mercy of God is exerting its sacred and purifying influence. Religion is to him not the cold balance of certain restrictions and certain comforts, but the warm acknowledgments of infinite obligation, and everlasting love. It is the blessed and refreshing conviction, that yet a little while, and the veil which hides him from his true happiness will be withdrawn, that yet a little while, and the Saviour into whose hands he has confided the great interests of his soul will return, and call him back from the grave, to gladden him with the accents of eternal tenderness, “Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” He thus “*looks*” for this event. He is intently interested in its reality. He connects with this ultimate happiness of his soul in Christ all the intervening struggles of virtue, all the resistance to temptation, all the efforts of self-controul, all the endurance of trial. This hope cheers the darkness of life, and brightens all its comforts. Every gift of temporal pleasure reminds him of this richer heritage, and throws the hue of heaven’s own gladness over the sur-

face of domestic enjoyments. Oh! he is the happy man, who takes his daily blessings as at a father's hands, and who is yet able when these are wrecked, to repose his thoughts upon the intercourse of eternity! These emotions thus dignify the practical morality of life, and render the ties of virtue not the chains of fear, but the golden links of gratitude and joy.

Such is the attitude of mind which the Almighty's kindness is calculated and designed to produce upon those who credit its existence, and admit its extent. Oh! let a lodgment be made in our understandings and in our hearts, for this great and momentous subject. It is a certain truth, that the only ultimate felicity for man is the restoration of his affections to his God, and these affections cannot return to God except through a discovery of his true character. We cannot love that which does not appear to us to be lovely; we *must* love what *does* appear to be lovely. It is the indestructible nature of our being to do this. We should all become godly, if we could but see more attraction in God, than in the gratifications of the world and of sense! How quickly should we recoil from the allurements of licentiousness, from the vanity and pride of life, did we but estimate aright their influences upon our character, and their direct power to injure, and ultimately to destroy our peace! How eagerly should we throw

ourselves into the arms of God's compassion, and warm ourselves in the sunshine of his promises, did we but comprehend justly his system of atonement and intercession! Our misery lies in our ignorance of the relation of things. Oh, would the poor moth rush into the brilliant flame, if it knew the tendency of that flame to destroy? And would man grow daily more familiar with levity and sin, if he really knew the operation of such levity and such sin, upon the sanctity and the safety of his relations with God! It is sometimes replied, that we wish to proselyte men to our own opinions: truly it is a very poor thing to effect such an object. Oh! gladly would the minister of Christ leave others in undisturbed possession of their opinion, if he could believe that they cherished no opinion destructive of their true happiness!

But believing the Bible to be the standard of good and evil, can the Christian teacher see unmoved the current practice of mankind, or hear unconcerned the actual opinions of society. Rather will he not blush to think that his zeal is so cold, his heart so hard, and his desire for human happiness so limited and restrained! Oh, for that holy charity, which has patiently toiled amidst reproach, imprisonment, and death itself, in order to mitigate the woes, or to enlighten the ignorance of mankind! How noble, how generous a spectacle is that fur-

nished by the great promulgator of Christianity to the Gentiles. “None of those things move me, neither count I my life dear to me, so I may but finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God!” Oh, it was not to proselyte to opinions, it was to save immortal souls from the perdition of sin, and to make bloom again the withered hopes of man with respect to God and to eternity; this it was which gave activity to his charity, and warmth and energy to his ministry! Hence his language, and his feeling, and his entreaty were ever of this kind, “We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!”

May God enlighten our consciences and convert our hearts! May he win a way to our best affections, by the discovery of his compassion, and bursting before our view the delusions of life, may he enable us to repose the burden of our expectations upon the reception of his gospel, upon the atonement of his Son, upon the sanctification of his Spirit, and upon the growing conformity of our minds to the plan of his moral government of the world!

SERMON VI.

THE CONDITION AND PROSPECTS OF A CHRISTIAN.

HEBREWS xiii. 4.

“FOR HERE WE HAVE NO CONTINUING CITY, BUT WE SEEK ONE
TO COME.”

THE wise and repeated consideration of the brevity of human life, is a habit of mind of great importance to human welfare. For though the limit of our existence on earth be not capable of enlargement by our sagacity, yet does the responsibility under which we pass that existence stretch its dark or its bright influence over the duration of eternity. A Christian mind will cling to such a subject—a Christian mind will add to its musings the declaration of the Apostle, “We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come.”

Such a man will find portrayed, in the words of the text,

I. HIS PRESENT CONDITION.

II. HIS FUTURE PROSPECTS.

III. THE FEELINGS WITH WHICH HE OUGHT TO CONTEMPLATE THAT PROSPECT.

I. These words describe, in the first place, the Christian's *condition in the present world*. "*We have here no abiding city.*"

It was a remark of this same apostle, that the ancient patriarchs dwelt in "tabernacles and tents," denoting their character as pilgrims and wanderers on the earth. A city is a term illustrative of security, and of continuance; a tent is pitched to-day, and taken up to-morrow. When the apostle then observes that we have no abiding city, he contrasts the abiding city with the momentary tabernacle; and means to tell us that here we have no secure abode, no lasting resting-place; that our condition is one of change, of restlessness, and of decay. This condition is natural to man; not indeed his original destiny, but his condition since the forfeiture of his innocence. Death, with its forerunners of vicissitudes and of suffering, is the penalty due to sin; and in this condition even the best Christian fully participates. Christianity offers no exemption from the ravages of sorrow to its most faithful adherents. In this respect, "one event happens to the righteous and the wicked." "The place that knew us once, soon knows us no more." "All flesh is grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." "We bring our years to an end,

even as it were a tale that is told." Tears fall ; the heart mourns ; the friend dies ; we die ourselves. This is our brief and trite history ; a history soon told, but a history, nevertheless, comprising much that is awful and disastrous ; and not the less disastrous because it is trite and obvious. There is, however, a surprising difference in the manner in which men come into contact with the perception of suffering and of decay. Men, occupied with worldly objects as the *exclusive* sources of their happiness, endeavour to obscure and to throw aside the convictions which calamity would force upon their minds. There have indeed been found worldly men of gloomy minds, who have, without any religion to cheer the scene, loved to speculate amidst images of woe and of decay ; and who have almost made man a subject for mockery and derision. And there have been, likewise, men of another cast, though actuated by no better principles, who have endeavoured, by the cultivation of apathy, of indifference, to extinguish the distinction between pain and pleasure. But the generality of worldly persons rather shudder at the details of suffering ; they make constant and laborious efforts to throw a deceitful lustre over the chequered scenes of human life. They wish to lead themselves and others to the conviction that pleasure and hilarity are the main springs

of happiness; and that to anticipate misfortune when absent, or in any manner to cherish it when present, is to deprive themselves alike of wisdom and of comfort.

To condemn sickness is not however to insure health; and thoughtlessness of calamity may perhaps deepen its ultimate gloom. But a real Christian is not afraid to look calamity in the face. He is not afraid to investigate its causes, or to learn its lessons. He knows that God is too benevolent a being to have covered the earth with traces of sorrow, if there existed, on the part of man, no adequate ground of provocation. In the mind of the Christian, therefore, sorrow is associated with sin. Reflection, contrition, humility—these ever accompany him along the path of his affliction. The apostle never shrinks from the avowal, that we have here no abiding city. Another apostle addresses his converts under the special character of wanderers on earth. “I beseech you therefore,” he says, “as pilgrims and strangers.”

The disposition to build up an earthly dwelling place, is the source of much evil. It veils from our view the reality of our situation; and while it may gladden by a bright, but momentary delusion, it prepares us for a more terrible and unexpected grasp of sorrow. A true Christian is aware of this deception, and by the grace of God becomes familiar with the

subjects of affliction, welcomes them as friends, and longs that they should fulfil their whole errand to his soul. He recognizes the truth, that by no power of thought, no measure of sagacity, no circumspection of conduct, no violence of effort, can he by his own resources disengage himself from the curse under which he lies. The record is palpably written, not merely on the page of revelation, but on the page of fact and experience—"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. "We have here no abiding city." This record is too plainly written for him to deny its import, or to overlook its fulfilment in his own case. He looks around him, and he sees that all things are in a state of progress to destruction. He must shortly quit the dearest object which life may present to him, and enter upon a new and different kind of existence. "It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment;" after that, the allotment of an eternal recompense, whether of wrath or mercy. This conviction fastens upon his soul; it is a solemn conviction calculated to exert a surprising and strong influence upon an intelligent being.

II. The apostle admits this, when he adds, "we seek a city to come." It may be allowed that the anticipation of evil would perhaps be

folly, if such evil admitted of no remedy ; but it is not true of this world's sufferings, that they admit of no remedy. There is a use to be made of serious reflection, by which the ultimate effects of sin may be prevented. Amidst the wreck of human things, there is a voice which proclaims, "I am the resurrection and the life." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In reference to this plan of mercy, the apostle says, "we seek a city to come."

There is a state of imperishable happiness—there is a dwelling-place of unassailable strength, as secure from the assaults of sorrow, as it is replenished with "the fulness of joy;" there is a home in the mansions of God, our heavenly Father, where every tear is wiped away, and every sin is forgiven, and every imperfection is supplied ; "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest ;" where all is bright, and firm, and happy, because all is holy and without spot or blemish, and this for ever. The Saviour of the world pointed to this city to come when He addressed his dejected disciples in these ever memorable words, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are

many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you ; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there may ye be also." Now it is the possibility of an entrance into this fenced city, it is the possibility of obtaining a share in this inheritance of peace and joy, which gives reflection its value, and the anticipation of sorrow and death all its usefulness and importance. If there were no future blessedness—if there were no foundations laid in the everlasting purpose of God, on which the walls of this city of joy might rest, then seriousness of mind might be well exchanged for the laughter of folly, and the Saducean proverb be received as the decision of sagacity, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

But there doth remain a rest for "the people of God." It is a matter placed beyond the reach of conjecture or of hazard, that there is "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Its blessed inhabitants "rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." They hunger, they thirst, they sorrow, they die no more. They are with their Saviour, and their God, and become partakers of his eternity and of his felicity. They see face to face, and know even as they are known. The obscurity of human knowledge is ex-

changed for the brightness of truth ; the vicissitudes of earth for the perpetuities of heaven. The certainty of this state of existence forced even from the lips of an ungodly prophet the exclamation, “ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

The notions indeed which worldly men form of heaven, are very indistinct ; and while perhaps scarcely any individual is to be found who does not connect an idea of happiness with the term heaven, yet it is to be feared that very few labour to ascertain in what that happiness is likely to consist. And in this lamentable want of honest and of Christian curiosity, they evince their present unfitness for its hallowed enjoyments. Oh for the warning voice which should arrest their attention—“ Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” But to a true Christian, the terms “ heaven,” “ city to come,” “ a rest,” “ a welcome to a Father’s house,” convey notions, which if not perfectly intelligible, are yet sufficiently accurate to awaken feelings, and to excite hopes of the most affecting and delightful kind. In his mind, heaven is as nearly as possible opposed to earth. *Here* he finds sin, pollution, ignorance, passion, sorrow, death ; *there* he expects to find knowledge, holiness, reason, religion, gladness, eternal life. *Here* he finds a world in arms

against its God ; *there* he anticipates a world submissive and obedient to the great and glorious lawgiver. *Here* he finds perturbation, restlessness, disappointment, and vexation ; *there* he looks for the settled peace of virtue, the unchanging tranquillity of innocence and of truth. *Here* he finds Christ dishonoured, insulted, and forgotten ; *there* he beholds his Saviour enthroned in every heart, and receiving the homage of grateful and ceaseless adoration—“ Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood ; unto him be glory, and honour, and blessing, henceforth, even for ever.”

III. The *sensations* with which a Christian contemplates this city to come, are sufficiently distinct and intelligible. If he believes that there is a city yet to come, he is reasonably excited by these convictions. He is conscious of their exerting a strong influence upon his soul. He is urgently moved to *seek* that city to come. He contemplates that secure abode with feelings something similar to those with which a sinking mariner would contemplate a rock which lifted its head amidst the dashings of the surrounding waves. If he can reach the rock, he escapes death.

Let us dwell for a little moment upon this point—“ we *seek* a city to come.” The apostle *here* intimates that there is a correspondence

between a Christian's principles and his pursuits. No man can rationally survey his present condition without the greatest possible uneasiness, if he does not combine with it the great remedy for all this calamity—if he does not advert, and this continually, to the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ, and to the conversion of the heart to God, as a qualification or meetness for the holy felicity of the heavenly world.

“We seek a city to come. That is, it is the object of our interest, of our anxiety, and of our pursuit. We have embarked our everlasting all in this enterprise. If we gain not an habitation in this heavenly city, we must be miserable; deluded here, and lost hereafter. Our minds therefore are keenly alive to the great work of salvation; it is the great matter that arrests our attention, and that excites our activity. We feel that every thing else is utterly insignificant; that it would profit us nothing could we gain the whole world and lose our souls, for what can be rationally given in exchange for our souls. Hence it is now our absorbing solicitude to be found in Christ; to work out our eternal salvation; to be rendered capable of the high and spiritual enjoyments of the future world—we *seek* a city to come.”

The expression implies that we greatly de-

sire that city ; that we are not unacquainted with its society, its splendour, its security, its Prince. It implies that our affections are clinging to the hope of that felicity which it imparts ; that we do not advert to it as the last refuge to which we are painfully forced to fly, when every other shelter fails us ; but that we are *seeking* that city as having laid up our treasures there ; as having, even on earth, a growing conformity of mind with its unsullied purity.

The child at a distance from home, associates gladness with his meditations upon that home ; the exile, long absent from his native land, hears the name of that land with sacred emotions of interest and of affection ; and the true Christian, with at least as much of reason and of sense, *seeks* his better home, and desires that land where his kindred and his Saviour dwell. "To me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." "I heard a voice from heaven, which said, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.'" Happy, thrice happy, are those whose minds sympathize and accord with these aspirations ; and who are seeking in sincerity their everlasting home in heaven.

But it is ever well to deal practically with such a question, and to press home its important topics upon our own hearts. The reason, perhaps, why we are often afraid of too much

religion, is that our hearts are not interested in the subjects which that religion reveals. We are not *seeking* this city. If we ever think of it, it is by constraint. Our treasure is not there; for when does religion become truly gladdening to the heart? when does it carry home to the bosom its elevating and blessed consolations? It is when we understand ourselves, and when the world is stripped of the mask by which it deceives us. It is when descending from the pedestal of human pride, we credit the scriptural record, and take our place, as sinners, at the foot of the cross. It is when believing that by our sins we have forfeited all right to God's bounty, we cast ourselves upon his grace and mercy, in Christ Jesus. It is when harassed, and afflicted, and humbled by the corruption and worldliness of our hearts, we yield ourselves up to the converting influence of God's Spirit, and seek the shelter of an arm mightier than our own. It is when satisfied that if God were to enter into judgment with us, we could not answer him in that judgment, we assume the attitude, we acquire the feeling, and adopt the language of the publican, and smite upon the breast, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Oh *then* it is that the doctrines of Christianity assume a loveliness in our eyes, which was utterly hidden from us in the days of our worldliness and

our pride! Then it is that the thought of a city to come,—a home in heaven, with Christ, yields inexpressible alleviation to the burdened mind!

And are *we* not hastening to the eternal world; and know we what a single day may bring forth! Are *we* then right as to our views of that world, to which we are tending so rapidly? An error here is an error too fatal to be admitted, for it may remain unrectified for ever. The name of Christianity, the form of Christianity, may be sufficient in life, but it is not sufficient in death; or if it should be sufficient on this side of the grave, it will not be adequate on the other side. When the tremendous realities of heaven and hell burst in upon the soul, how well to have realized them by faith on earth, and to have acted according to our belief of those realities! Oh let us redeem the time, because the days are evil; let us labour by serious reading of the Bible, by fervent prayer, by honest self-examination, to attain that true conversion of heart, that real regeneration of the soul, which will prepare us for the summons to meet our God! which will ensure to us, through the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ, a share in the blessedness of heaven!

SERMON VII.

NECESSITY FOR RELIGIOUS CAUTION.

HEBREWS i. 4.

“LET US THEREFORE FEAR LEST A PROMISE BEING LEFT US OF ENTERING INTO HIS REST, ANY OF YOU SHOULD SEEM TO COME SHORT OF IT.”

THE apostle refers to a very striking illustration of human folly, in the history of his countrymen, under the guidance and instruction of Moses; and he draws from thence the caution in the text. The Israelites had been in bondage in Egypt. God sent to them a deliverer; God promised to them a valuable inheritance in Canaan; but between them and this inheritance, were interposed a howling wilderness and numerous enemies. When under the pressure of present difficulties, they “thought scorn of that pleasant land, and gave no credence unto God’s word.” They sighed after the very bondage which they had quitted, and turned back in heart from their God.” He therefore spake to them in his wrath, and forbade them entrance into the promised land. That whole

race, with two exceptions, perished in the wilderness.

Now there is a striking analogy here between the conduct of ancient Israel, and that of the majority of those who profess Christianity. God offers to their acceptance the promises and hopes of his gospel ; the inheritance above which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. He offers to them perpetual safety in the full pardon of all their sins. He offers to them victory over worldly passions, and the renewal of their hearts to true holiness. He offers to them his friendship and unchanging love, and all the sacred manifestations of that love in the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. But, attracted and influenced by worldly considerations, the generality of men have no delight in the contemplation of these munificent offers. They practically reject all this goodness, and prefer the gratifications of time and sense to present godliness and to future glory. Referring then to a past history of folly and ingratitude ; and mindful of the hereditary and invariable depravity of man, the apostle urges the Hebrew converts in the text, to fear “ lest a promise being left to them of entering into God’s eternal rest, any of them should seem to come short of it.”

Let us transfer the application of this subject from Israel to ourselves ; let us enquire, by

God's help into the condition of our own minds, and let us ask solemnly and seriously whether there be not some danger "lest a promise of blessedness being made unto ourselves, any of us should seem to come short of it."

I. Let us first consider the important and consolatory truth, that WE HAVE ACTUALLY A PROMISE MADE TO US OF AN ETERNAL REST. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a hope of life by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Let not your heart be troubled, in my father's house are many mansions." "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

In these expressions the scriptures refer to a future rest or to that blessedness which is reserved for the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in a higher and a better world. The speculations of philosophy, the deductions of unassisted reason are uncertain and vague; but not so the declarations of Christianity. While many subjects therein contained are presented to our faith, which, as to the *mode* of their existence are placed beyond the range of our loftiest faculties, the decisions of

Christianity are yet entirely level to the lowest, as to the glorious assurances which they contain of eternal happiness through Jesus Christ. Christianity is no cunningly devised fable, but a certain and substantial offer of inconceivable felicity. It finds us wretched, and poor, and blind, and miserable. It finds us deluded in our estimate of good and evil, depraved in our propensities, and earthly in our habits. It finds us exposed to the inflictions of divine wrath, even to the terrible penalty of a moral perdition, and finding under this deplorable condition, it brings near to us the astonishing tidings, the good news of pardon, grace, and mercy through the mediation of Jesus Christ. It tells us in words too plain to be questioned, that though we have ruined ourselves, in God is our help. It tells us, that "God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." It tells us that God is still willing to be our father, our comforter, and our friend, that he has provided an atonement and satisfaction to his injured law and authority in the sacrifice and death of his Son, and that in the midst of all our provocations, insults, ingratitude, and folly, he yet waits to be gracious to us. It tells us that true religion is thus, not a harsh series of rugged restraints, but a voice of peace and of kindness inviting us to all the happiness which results from the recovered favour of

God, and from the anticipations of future glory. It tells us that true religion is nothing less than light beaming in upon our darkness, than hope cheering our despair, than mercy removing our guilt, than life driving away death, than immortality beckoning us to the fruition of the joys of paradise. In brief, it reveals to us a “rest” to be enjoyed here in peace of conscience, and hereafter in heavenly felicity; a “rest,” which as it is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ is alike attainable by every offender, however more or less aggravated his sins may be; a rest, which as it is the purchase of a Saviour’s blood, is “given without money and without price” to him who believeth. There is no other qualification needed than a sense of misery and a desire after the very happiness which it engages to bestow—and without such qualifications it cannot be enjoyed; for as it is not simply an outward escape from visible evils, but a spiritual deliverance from the inward diseases of a defiled heart, it is not conceivable that such a rest can apply itself but to a heart hungering and thirsting after a spiritual salvation.

The adaptation of this rest to the weariness of man is very striking. Are we not inwardly debased and wretched? are we not dying, and our comforts dying also? Is not the grave our last abode on earth, and beyond is there not a

fearful judgment, a righteous retribution." Oh do we not want this Christianity? do we not want this mercy, this grace, this deliverance? Do we not want his aid who "has the keys of death and hell?" Do we not want the might of an arm which can open again the door of the sepulchre, and "become the resurrection and the life." Do we not want an arm which can beat down Satan under our feet, and guide our steps into a land of quietness and love? Do we not want the robe of salvation, and the garment of righteousness in which we "may be presented faultless before the presence of God with exceeding joy? Do we not want, in fine, a rest, the very rest of the gospel, a rest from sin, a rest from sorrow, a rest from ignorance, a rest from death, a rest from the struggles of corruption, a rest from fear, a rest from the perils of perdition? Do we not want a reuniting world, a home where friends never separate, where tears never flow, where evil never defiles? Do we not want an asylum and an inheritance which is at once incorruptible and undefiled? And such an asylum, such a "rest there actually remaineth for the people of God," we have "a promise of entering into this rest."

II. But we must now observe, THAT THIS REST IS PROMISED TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD, AND TO THEM ALONE. Into that world of light and of love nothing enters that defiles. It is a

world of purity, truth, allegiance, affection to God; its inhabitants are all righteous, its enjoyments are all holy, its pleasures "are at God's right hand." Those who dwell there are "the ransomed of the Lord, who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb." They are animated by the most intense gratitude to their great benefactor. They owe all to his unmerited grace, and their joy is founded on their entire conformity with his character. It is an important consideration that the happiness of heaven is derived from the agreement between the dispositions of its inhabitants and the government of its king. No schism, no revolt, no alienation, no reluctance, no coldness towards God is felt in heaven; God is love, and all who dwell near him "dwell in love;" love to him and to each other. Many persons appear to overlook the necessity for this conformity of mind to God in their notions, if notions they distinctly form of heaven, many appear to think that the happiness of the other world, except perhaps in very atrocious cases, is almost the certain heritage of their kind, that somehow or other, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, they will ultimately be happy: that as in Adam all die, even so in the most unlimited sense of the terms, all in Christ shall be made alive."

But although the design of Christianity be general, though the door of mercy be so wide

as to admit all who come to it, though the “sin which is as red as crimson may be made white as snow,” though “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all iniquity,” yet all these blessings are eternally connected with *the characters* to which they apply. These blessings are not forced upon man, are not the *necessary* and compulsive result of Christianity. Those who see God are “the pure in heart,” those who enter into rest “are the humble and broken in heart.” The happiness of heaven where God dwells, is a happiness, the result of holiness. God is himself happy because he is holy, and the ransomed of the Lord are happy in heaven, because they are not only pardoned but sanctified, because they are made like God, and are enabled to delight in all his righteous administrations. They find all around them adapted to their wishes, and consonant with their views, therefore they are happy. Hence the scriptures speak of the *possibility of coming short of the glory of God*, of being excluded from this rest. They speak of “a destruction from the presence of the Lord, when he comes to be admired and glorified in his saints,” they speak of an awful separation between those who have accepted and those who have overlooked his overtures of mercy. They speak not only of rest for the just, but of weariness for the unjust. They speak of peace to God’s children, but of wretchedness to his enemies.

III. NOW THE POSSIBILITY OF COMING
 * SHORT OF THE BLESSEDNESS OF HEAVEN IS
 AN IDEA SO TREMENDOUS, THAT IT MAY
 WELL AFFECT THE MIND WITH AWE. The
 apostle says, “ Let us therefore *fear lest a pro-
 mise being left us of entering into his rest, any of
 you should seem to come short of it:*” and on
 another occasion, the same apostle directs us
 “ to work out our own salvation with *fear and
 trembling.*” The interests of eternity are of so
 vast a nature, the hazard so great, and the ap-
 parent improbability of retrieving error after
 death is so plainly stated, that the supposition
 of carelessness, in so great a matter, is a sup-
 position fearful in the extreme. All human
 evils are tolerable, because they are momen-
 tary. Earthquake, shipwreck, loss of property,
 death of friends, these calamities are limited,
 but the loss of salvation is an intolerable evil,
 because it is an evil which seems to admit of
 no termination. Oh who can endure, what
 heart can maintain its fortitude, if God shall
 enter with it into judgment? There is there-
 fore no spectacle more affecting to a kind and
 reflecting mind, than that of carelessness in re-
 ligion. There is no object more pitiable than
 that of an immortal being, wasting the few
 precious hours of life in the frivolous occu-
 pations of pleasure, or in the severer pursuits
 of gain, while yet he is reckless of the pains
 and pleasures, the gains and losses of eternity!

Can it then be denied, that our situation is one of danger and of uncertainty. Our time is short, our death is near, our everlasting destiny is suspended in doubtful balance ; our sins are many, our foes numerous, our corruptions strong. But a glorious prize is placed before us ; good news has reached our ears. Pardon is proclaimed to the guilty, and peace is offered to the weary soul. The Saviour of sinners invites us to come to him, with a promise of eternal felicity. He bids us seek the conversion and renewal of our hearts ; he bids us supplicate the succours of divine grace, and he promises for our support, the might of his own omnipotence. He tells us at the same time, not to delay our acceptance of his great salvation, because many will seek at last to reach it who will not be able!

A few, very few fleeting years, and this busy scene will to us be the stillness of the grave, and the land of utter forgetfulness ; but the conscious spirit will weep or rejoice in another world ; *now* then is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation. Now urged by the generosity of redeeming love, let us cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light ; now let us watch and be sober, let us reflect and pray ; let us *fear*, lest the time of mercy terminate, and God say in his wrath that we shall never enter into that rest which we have so long neglected and despised.

BUT are we not very unreasonable in our judgment of religious anxiety? We are allowed of the world to be very anxious upon events connected with our *present* prosperity. If our fortune be endangered, or if the health of the body be sapped and injured, we are permitted to express solicitude, and to labour after recovery. But if the interest endangered rise in its importance, if the health of the soul be suspected, if the inheritance of eternity be at hazard, if the solicitude of the bosom take a nobler direction, if the longing of the heart be after Christ and his salvation, then we are often blamed and reproached, we are even suspected and avoided! How unreasonable, how unnatural! Shall a man be accused of folly, or be charged with uncharitableness, because he would not fling away his soul, or turn from him who speaks from the cross, and beseeches him to accept his astonishing salvation!

Let us *fear*—says the apostle, and he says this under the guidance of inspiration: he says this, because a holy caution belongs to a man who has so much to lose, and so much to gain. And in truth, the foundation on which alone a religious life can rest, is this seriousness of mind: until we are in earnest, we do nothing in religion. We may take up opinions, and we may lay them down, but all is fatally wrong until a holy fear be awakened in the soul. Yes,

until we enter into our closet, and commune with God, until we acknowledge that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of our righteous judge, until we fear of falling short of this promised rest, all is false and hollow in our situation and prospects !

The prize of heavenly glory calls for deep attention and heartfelt anxiety in those who are candidates for its blessedness. “ The kingdom of heaven,” says our Saviour, “ suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” But is it not worth this effort, is it not worth this devotedness of heart ?

Who can measure the amount of the felicity of heaven ? Who can tell his brother the vastness of that honour which God has reserved for his people ? What eye hath seen, or what ear has heard, or what imagination has conceived, the fulness of that joy which God has prepared for those who love him ?

To die in Christ, to be saved from destruction, to be welcomed amid saints and angels, within the hallowed walls of the eternal city, to hear those soul-touching accents, “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Oh ! to share this blessedness is worth every struggle and every privation of earth ! May such felicity be all our own !

SERMON VIII.

THE BLESSINGS AND DUTIES OF THE GOSPEL.

REVELATIONS i. 5, 6.

“ UNTO HIM THAT LOVED US, AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD, AND HATH MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD AND HIS FATHER, TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION FOR EVER AND EVER.”

It need scarcely be remarked that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance. “ Do this in remembrance of me.” It was the last solemn ceremony of devotion with which the Redeemer sanctified his intercourse with his disciples. They indeed at that time understood not his intentions ; they little entered into his views, as he thus anticipated the shedding of that blood which would hereafter cleanse from sin unnumbered multitudes of the human race. But after his separation from the world and his ascension into glory, the light of his Spirit beamed upon this spiritual darkness. Then the apostles fully comprehended the nature of his sufferings and the vastness of his grace. The garden of Geth-

semane, the cross, the grave, these were places which their remembrance loved to visit, because with the sadness of these recollections was associated all that now gave value to life, or consolation in the prospect of death. The sufferings of Christ were the topic on which they were never weary of descanting, for by those sufferings they were redeemed, by “those stripes they were healed.” “God forbid,” says the apostle to the Gentiles, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.” And are not *our* highest interests bound up in the belief “that God hath given to us eternal life” in Jesus Christ?

Separate from Christ are *we* not ruined? United unto Christ are we not safe for ever? No act of memory is therefore so important as the recollection of Jesus Christ. That noble faculty of the soul is utterly abused until put in exercise upon this subject. Be it stored with all that is profound in philosophy, all that is elegant in taste, tender in sentiment, or various in science, it reaches not the aim with which it was imparted, until it be consecrated to the history of the Redeemer’s death. “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The purest worldly recollections may become hurtful and afflictive—and all such knowledge

ultimately vanishes away — but the remembrance of the cross of Christ casts its radiance at once over the sorrows of time, and over the terrors of eternity. The remembrance of Jesus Christ calms and fortifies the soul in its conflicts with calamity, and in its struggles with death. “Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,” exclaimed an aged saint, “for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;” Yes—“unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father, unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

Let us occupy the brief moment allotted to the present ministration, in the contemplation of that love which we commemorate in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Let us meditate upon that hallowed ordinance at once with a spirit of intelligence, and with a spirit of gratitude. It is our duty to remember Jesus Christ, but to remember him aright, we must understand his character, and estimate his benefits. Gratitude is the offspring of knowledge, “we love him because he first loved us.” Christianity is a subject of deep interest, as it reveals the essential and unchanging perfections of God, as it represents the nature of the Deity, and the character of his administration of the universe. But Christianity becomes a subject of yet more intense interest, as it exhibits those

perfections, and that character in their direct connection with our own happiness.

The Almighty Jehovah that inhabits eternity as his resting-place, challenges by his *power*, our veneration and our praise—but Jehovah incarnate, assuming a mortal form, that he might become capable of mortal anguish, this view of Jehovah which is the glory of Christianity, is an exhibition of costly *tenderness*, calculated in the highest degree to attract our affection and to invite our confidence.

It is not the intention at present to offer any particular explanation of the Lord's supper; but rather to touch on it incidentally, and in this manner to connect it with the ascription of praise contained in the text. That ascription of praise is founded on the benefits which Jesus Christ has conferred upon his followers. The reception of mercies is the basis of corresponding obligation, "Unto Christ be glory and praise," because "he hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

I. Let us notice then, THE BLESSINGS WHICH JESUS CHRIST HAS CONFERRED ON US, and

II. THE DUTY WHICH ARISES OUT OF THE ENJOYMENT OF THOSE BLESSINGS.

I. The BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL are expressed in these words, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own

blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father."

The *love* of Jesus Christ to human beings is the ultimate source of all their happiness. It is difficult to raise our conceptions to the nature of this love, for it has no parallel. The actions by which it has been exemplified, are however at once the proofs of its existence, and the just measure of its extent. It is then affirmed of this love, that it induced Jesus Christ "to wash us from our sins in his own blood." In offering any remarks upon this subject, it is needful to adhere closely to the statements¹ of the Bible. It is there that we must study the human character, and take our estimate of human merit or demerit. Now the scriptures affirm, that "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not," "that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked," and that consequently "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Hence, however specious may be the appearance of human character, however plausible may be the embellishments of civilization, however touching and amiable may be the effects of natural affection—however splendid may be the testimony to social fidelity or to patriotic enterprise, nevertheless the heart of man, when measured by the standard of God's law, when brought to the test of the divine purity, is corrupt and

perverted. His understanding is darkened, his affections are disordered, his allegiance is broken. In this just and adequate sense of the term, he *fears* not God, he *loves* not God, he naturally prefers his own wishes to God's commands. Such at least are the declarations of the Bible—and these declarations accord exactly with the history of the world, and with the experience of our own minds.

We understand the nature of that generous devotedness to the service of another, of which the annals of human friendship furnish us with many brilliant examples. Let that standard of devotedness though confessedly inadequate, be yet applied to the history of our devotedness to God, and candour will at once admit that such allegiance we do not possess. Whose bosom does the love of God thus animate? Whose conduct affords attestation to those ardent emotions of gratitude, to that unbroken energy of fidelity which no bribe can warp, no difficulty discourage? The man is not to be found who can endure this scrutiny, and yet the want of this devotedness is nothing short of rebellion, inasmuch as it implies the withdrawing of the affections from God. And the penalty attached to that rebellion is nothing short of a moral perdition. These statements are strong and mournful, but if true, they are unaffected by the repugnance with which

we may receive them. Now this moral depravity and this liability to consequent and perpetual misery, is the foundation on which the love of Christ rests its astonishing manifestation—"Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." His love induced him to "wash us from our sins." "He gave himself for our sins," says another apostle.

The history of Jesus Christ is a series of the most affecting and bitter sufferings. Though angels celebrated his miraculous birth, yet it was into the lowest form of human society that they announced his entrance into the world; and though he exhibited in his life every attractive grace of kindness and generosity, yet he passed that life amidst scorn and contempt, and terminated it by a violent and infamous death. Stretched upon the cross, between two notorious malefactors, he bowed his head to the malice of man, and to the inflictions of God. And what is the explanation given in the Bible of these mysterious transactions? It is this, "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities; all we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He assumes our nature—he was dealt with as a malefactor—he bore the severe inflictions of God—he endured for our sakes the pangs and

the curse of death. God was so merciful, that he would offer us pardon: God was so holy, that he required the expiation of our sins. Jesus Christ reconciled the claims of these conflicting attributes, and died that we might live. "The just died for the unjust," that the unjust might escape the destruction which they entirely merited.

Yet let it not be thought that this act of mediation, this act of incomprehensible generosity was intended to afford a premium to vice, or to loosen the ties of moral obligation. For the love of Christ has not only washed his people from their sins, but has made them "kings and priests unto God and his father;" expressions which mark out the complete allegiance and moral dignity of those who are the subjects of this grace as well as the objects of this love. They are denominated "kings," because by the power of the Spirit of God acting through the medium of this record of love, the shackles of sin are broken, the slavery of passion is terminated, the degradation of iniquity is removed. They are become as "kings" to exercise dominion over the corrupt affections by which they were once enthralled. They are as "kings," being elevated by the love of holiness, and by the practice of truth and charity. They are as "kings," to wear the crown pro-

mised to fidelity unto death, to reign with Christ in the possession of a kingdom which shall have no end ; to sway the sceptre of dominion when he grants to them to “ sit down with him upon the throne” of his everlasting triumph. “ Unto him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I overcame and am set down upon my father’s throne.” Words of vast and momentous import! But they are likewise said to be “ priests” as well as “ kings.” The office of the priests was to offer sacrifices and prayers to God, and the redeemed of the Lord are truly *priests* as well as *kings*. Purified by faith in the blood of the Lamb, they offer the hallowed sacrifices of righteousness and the praises of unending gratitude. They bring to God a clean heart and a contrite spirit, they bring to God the aspirations of inward devotion, the tribute of holy love and of grateful allegiance. Overwhelmed by the magnificence of his benefits and excited by the influences of the Comforter, they give themselves unto God “ a living sacrifice, acceptable in his sight.” They are no longer “ their own” but *his*, “ bought with a price that they should glorify God with their bodies and with their spirits which are his.” And when the period of their earthly pilgrimage is closed, they are carried to a higher and a

purser home where they join the anthems of angels, and swell the chorus of the redeemed. They mingle their voices with the hallelujahs of heaven, and are priests before the throne for ever and ever.

Such is the deliverance effected, and such the honour conferred by the love of Christ on man.

II. It is necessary to consider, in the next place THE OBLIGATIONS WHICH ARISE OUT OF THE ENJOYMENTS OF THESE BENEFITS—"Unto him that loved us," says the apostle, "unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

The enjoyment of these blessings is altogether unmerited by man. If there be one truth more evident than another in the Scriptures, it is the truth that we have no claim upon the justice of God; but that we have forfeited all title to his regard, and are exposed to his wrath. The salvation which he has wrought, is hence a salvation of gratuitous kindness. It is an undeserved and unsolicited act of love. Christ was under no obligation to mediate for man. No compulsion, save the compulsive charity of his own heart, brought him from heaven to earth. Every tear which He shed was a voluntary tear; every pang which He endured was a voluntary pang. If our race had perished, the law had but taken its righteous course. The interference of Jesus

Christ is therefore gratuitous. Salvation is of grace; and being of grace, it is freely offered to the most abandoned, as well as to the most amiable of mankind. Many glorified souls, in the pure regions of bliss, were once involved in all the defilements of iniquity, and are now the living monuments of the divine compassion. It is through the love of Christ that they are saved—"He loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood."

Now such spontaneous kindness claims a gratitude unmeasured in its extent, an obedience unreserved in its requirements. Unto this benefactor "be glory, and dominion, and praise."

Language is feeble to express the obligations which result from this salvation. They cannot, however; be more emphatically expressed, than in this ascription of praise. To utter sincerely these words, to give glory and praise to Jesus Christ, is, in fact, to consecrate to him the faculties and exertions of the soul. When the astonished apostle said to the arisen Redeemer, "My Lord and my God," he offered the most intense homage of which his heart was capable. And when the ransomed of the Lord ascribe power and glory to their Saviour, they, in very truth, yield their whole being to his service. They express their entire submission to his law; their glowing attachment to

his person. They pledge the unremitting ardour of their gratitude to him, whose generous love has saved them from the abyss of misery. "Unto thee be praise;" "Unto thee be glory;" "Thy kingdom come;" "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." No man can with honesty ascribe glory and praise to Christ, who withholds from him deliberately the homage and the obedience of his heart and life—As his Lord and his God; as his mediator and redeemer; as his benefactor and his friend, he owes to him the unlimited consecration of himself; and when he exclaims, "Unto Thee be the praise, unto Thee be the dominion," he gives utterance to these eternal obligations. He pours forth, in the fulness of gratitude and of astonishment, the short but rich avowal of his complete devotedness.

It will follow directly from these remarks, that the institution of the Lord's supper, is an appointment with which a real Christian will fully and tenderly concur. The love of Jesus Christ will appear to him so amazingly great, that every remembrance of it will be fondly cherished.

The periodical commemoration of great virtues, and of great endowments; of virtues displayed in *their* deliverance; of endowments disinterestedly consecrated to *their* service; such a commemoration finds a ready sympathy

in the hearts of mankind. Around the grave of the genuine patriot, a delivered people have often delighted to assemble. Remembrance has embalmed his great deeds; gratitude has held up to successive ages the spectacle of his munificent sacrifices. And shall a Christian be cold and reluctant when invited to consecrate his recollections of costly munificence, at the grave of Him who is the Benefactor, not of one nation, but of an entire world? Shall the love of Christ be impotent to excite to thankfulness, when the memorials of inferior kindness are viewed with warm and kindling emotions?

Let then the celebration of the sacrament be ever welcomed with all the sacred feelings of sympathy and of hope; feelings which, under the grace of God, shall not be allowed to pass away as a summer stream, but shall exert a momentous influence upon the whole of our moral being. May the remnant of our fleeting days be consecrated to Jesus Christ, our Friend, our Saviour, and our God!

Let us then use this act of remembrance as one test, among many others, whereby to judge of our state and of our character before God.

Shall we lay down a false standard of piety if we remark, that the emotion with which we habitually regard Jesus Christ, will be the just measure of our spiritual condition? The apostle Paul has used this very criterion, when he thus

spoke, out of the fulness of his heart, to the Ephesians—"Grace be to all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

Hence we may judge of our characters before God, by the views which we entertain, by the attachment of which we are conscious, towards this our dying but now living Benefactor! He once put this question to his disciples—"What think ye of Christ?" Let each one apply and grapple with this question in reference to his own heart. What do *we* think of Christ? In what manner have we received the record of his mediation?

There are those in whose bosoms no single chord is ever struck which vibrates to the name of Jesus Christ. There are those who live without affection to him, and without confidence in his merits. There are those, who having received the sign of the cross upon their foreheads, in their infant days, have tried hard to efface the blessed impression by all the sins and follies of maturer years. There are those who can turn away from the memorials of Christ's death, without a blush, and without a pang. There are those whose knees are never bent in lowly reverence to his eternal majesty, and whose prayers have never yet, in godly sincerity, supplicated a share in his salvation. There are those who live without repentance, without

faith, without charity, whose moral existence would undergo no change, if Christianity were proved a fable, the Bible a forgery, and Christ an imaginary Being! Oh what a condition then is theirs, if Christianity be the unfaltering record of God; if the Bible be the single charter of our felicity, and Christ the only Saviour of a ruined world!

Others there are, who, while they pay to Jesus Christ some distant homage, and have some kind of repose in the hope of his interposition in their favour, yet give him not the whole glory of their salvation; mingle a dependence on their own good deeds with their faith in his merits, and therefore come not into his presence with that lowliness of heart, with that prostration of soul which receives all mercy as a gratuitous gift of God. Oh let such remember that the death of Jesus Christ was no light and trivial event; that a remedy so vast and so costly marks out a state of danger and of sin far more terrific than they have been, perhaps, hitherto disposed to imagine; and that it may be needful to come to God with other and humbler views of their own unworthiness, and with other and deeper feelings of unreserved reliance upon the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

But, lastly, there are some whose aim, and wish, and toil it is to be wholly indebted and

wholly resigned to their Lord and Master—who survey the cross with emotions of indescribable interest; with mingled sensations of wonder, love, and gratitude. There are those who, deeply sensible of their guilt and wretchedness, have embraced, by faith, the free offers of everlasting love, and who esteem even the reproach of Christ greater riches than the collected treasures of a dying world! There are those who mourn with undissembled sorrow over the sin which still defiles them, and who long to possess a conscience void of offence to God and man; who, while they trust their future felicity to the faithful care of their Redeemer, labour as well as long, “to be conformed to his image, and to be holy, even as He is holy.”

Let such ever approach their Master's table with peace and joy. Let such rejoice that he has spread this table before them in the wilderness, and let them anticipate the time when they shall sit down with him whom they love and adore, in those mansions of bliss which he is certainly gone to prepare for them!

Then the measure of their felicity will be full. Then they will sin and they will sorrow no more. Then every foe will be absent, every tear will be dried, every burden will be removed, every agitation will be calmed, every

fear will be hushed, every calamity will be forgotten, every blank will be filled up! Then they will need no longer the imperfect admonition, "Do this in remembrance of me;" for they will see Jesus Christ face to face, and expand their renovated faculties in the sun-light of his countenance for ever and ever!

SERMON IX.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

“LET ME DIE THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS, AND LET MY LAST
END BE LIKE HIS.”

THESE are perhaps among the most remarkable words which ever issued from human lips. They bear a stamp of force and of truth peculiar to themselves. For under what circumstances were they uttered? A prophet illuminated of God, yet false to the convictions of his understanding—conscious of supernatural light, yet grasping after earth-born wealth—listens to the suggestions of a heathen king, in order to curse the people whom God had blessed. Tempted by the rewards proposed to him by Balak, Balaam, though forbidden of God to enter into his views, followed his messengers, in the hopes of being finally permitted to place the Israelites under the ban of Jehovah.

From a lofty eminence, in the presence of the king he surveyed the tents of Israel, and, under the mighty agency of inspiration, exclaimed,

“Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, ‘come curse me Jacob, and come defy me Israel.’ How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him. Lo! the people shall not dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

This prophetic voice of Balaam does not appear to refer simply to the temporal fortunes of Israel, to the benediction of God under which they would advance to the conquest of their foes, or to their distinct character and circumstances, which would never allow them to mingle with the other nations of the earth. All this may be implied; but if this were the full import of the prophecy, why does the seer, as he gazes upon the advancing multitude, speak of their “dust,” suddenly point his vision, not surely to the “dust” of their multitude, but to the “dust” of their sepulchre, and wish to partake of their mortal doom? Had it not more comported with his views and feelings to picture their growing conquests, and to wish to participate in their rising glory? Would it not

have suited the ambitious aspirations of his heart, to have deserted the falling fortunes of Balak, and to have embarked in the high career of the temporal prosperity of Israel? Yet he forgets their approaching victories, turns his eyes to the dust of their graves, and rather wishes to share the last end, the after-state of the innumerable dead destined to inhabit its silent regions! A sudden train of thought this, as inconceivably singular as important. Surely it was the direct inspiration of the Almighty; and may not this be its solution? As if he had said, "This people, stretched before my eyes, are *a typical people*. They are delivered from Egypt. They shall die in the wilderness. They shall not mingle with other nations; yet shall their nation inherit the promised land of Canaan. And in this they prefigure a mightier people. For thus, under the covenant of grace, the redeemed of the Lord, in every age, shall be rescued from the slavery of sin and of the world. They shall become a peculiar people. They shall not mingle with the spirit and pursuits of those around them, yet they shall die and moulder in the grave, even as others; but their last end, their after state, shall be bright and glorious. Their sleeping dust shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall awake to incorruption and to eternal glory. And who can count the 'dust' of these saved nations,

the dust of those who shall compose that hallowed company, whom no man can number, redeemed out of every tribe, and tongue, and people. Oh! in the view of this eternity, what is earthly ambition; what is wealth, and power, and fame; what but meteor lights, which beckon but to betray. ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!’ ”

Oh, had the sentiment lodged itself in the heart, the name of the prophet had been registered in the eternal book of life! But the rewards of earth prevailed, and the seer perished, as they will perish who prefer time to eternity, and the applause of man to the verdict of God! The time permits not, at this moment, to enter farther into the character of this extraordinary man; or to confirm any farther the interpretation which has been offered of the general scope of the prophecy. We are now charged with the simple sentiment uttered in its conclusion, and ask for a deep and earnest attention to an aspiration as wise and momentous as the voice of man ever expressed, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end or after state be like his.”

In elucidation of these words, let us consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THE DEATH WHICH THE RIGHTEOUS DIE.

II. THEIR AFTER STATE.

III. THE WISH OF THE PROPHET TO SHARE BOTH THE ONE AND THE OTHER.

I. Now the death of the righteous has much in common with the death of the wicked; but it has also much that is peculiar and distinctive. Death, we are told, is the wages of sin. We cannot speak of death but in connection with the transgression of the divine law. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." If therefore the righteous die, it is because they are likewise transgressors; and this may seem a paradox, but, in fact, the righteousness of the just is not now the righteousness of innocence, "but the righteousness which is of God, by faith in Jesus Christ." "Christ is now the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;" for "blessed," now, "is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered;" "blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Hence the fact of death stands in connection with all men, "for that all have sinned." There have been, and there will be, some exceptions; but the whole race of Adam have incurred the forfeiture of life; and if in any case the forfeiture be not called for, it is the result of another dispensation of kindness, altogether gratuitous.

Generally speaking, the sentence is ex-

ecuted, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." In this mortality all are alike involved, whatever be their character, their circumstances, or their country. "In Adam all die." To the righteous and to the wicked this destruction alike happeneth, "all flesh is grass, the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." As ages roll along, the wind of death sweeps alike over the tree of the forest as over the herb of the valley. They pass, and "the place that knew them, knoweth them no more." Deeply affecting is this constitution of human things: and wonted as is the spectacle, we cannot behold it without pangs and revulsion of heart.

"For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned;
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind."

The frailty of *natural* objects is sufficiently touching. Who can feel the growing chills of autumn, or mark the sickly foliage which drops and withers at his feet, without sensations which he well knows how to explain? It is the emblem of himself upon which he gazes. It is the wreck of those dear to him amidst which he walks. The analogy is an argument which strikes to the soul. Like those leaves before him, some friends have already passed away. Some perhaps, with whom he first un-

folded the strength of intellect, and felt the warmth of affection, already slumber in the grave. Others, bowed down with many sorrows and encompassed with many infirmities, are about to add another farewell to those which have already fallen upon his startled ear. And he himself perceives in his own frame symptoms of the same decay. The hour which shall number him also with the forgotten is nigh at hand. His schemes, his plans, his possessions, his enjoyments, his hopes, his fears, his occupations—these, as far as they are linked to this world, are about to terminate and to lie buried with himself in the unbroken silence of the tomb. He, like the millions that have gone before, and that may follow after, must see corruption, and moulder to his original dust! It is the lot of man, one event happeneth to all.

But although the death of all men has this principle in common, of privation, of forgetfulness, of destruction, yet are there circumstances which give a very peculiar and marked distinction to the death of the just. This distinction is found in the *moral* impressions which contain their character. They die in the emphatic language of the scriptures, “in the Lord,” “They sleep in Jesus.” They die under a promise which shall never be violated. They sleep under a fond protection which lights up all the

darkness of the short night that covers them. They sink to rest with hopes and joys, with wishes and feelings which ally them to Christ and place them in conformity to his will. They have believed his records, they have studied his character, they have accepted his mercy, they have sought pardon at his cross and healing from his abundant grace. They “knew the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.” They understood his death, and laboured to be conformed to its moral interpretation. They anxiously sought to be crucified to the world, and to be prepared for a nobler scene of existence. They comprehended the nature of their mortality, and under this strong perception they asked for the hand which could take away its sting. They were not ashamed to confess that all of peace, or of virtue, or of comfort which they enjoyed, they owed entirely to the love of Jesus Christ. They felt him to be their atonement, their peace, their sanctification, their strength, their joy, their repose. They loved him as their friend, they honoured him as their prince, they followed him as their model. “Born again of his Spirit” they lived as his children, and acted beneath his guidance. They received “eternal life as a gift at his hands,” and with thrilling gratitude listened to his words, “O Death, I will be thy plague, O grave I will be thy

destruction." These accents lost upon the air as they might seem through intervening ages, came back to their ears with a force and a freshness which under a high and sacred influence, at once moulded all their sentiments, and guided all their estimates of good and evil. They felt the truth which once warmed an apostle's heart, "None of us now liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself, but whether we die we die unto the Lord, or whether we live we live unto the Lord; whether therefore living or dying we are the Lord's, for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

Now this character thus formed by the contemplation of God's character, these moral impressions, the result of "the gospel," received into the heart by faith, these sentiments, the sacred stamp of the eternal Spirit upon the soul, give to the righteous a peculiarity of situation in death altogether their own. In the same chamber and on the same pallet might two persons lie in the struggles of death, in circumstances, to human eyes, exactly similar, but in reality altogether dissimilar. In the one instance no objects higher than the present world presented, ever quickened a pulsation of the heart. God was forgotten, Christ was overlooked, purity was undervalued, eternity was

neglected. Pleasure, and wealth, and human distinctions arrested the whole attention, and the character up to this moment of mortal struggle is earthly, low, and sensual! There is no knowledge of sin, no hope of victory through a Saviour, no stretching forth of the affections towards a munificent benefactor, no holy aspirations after a better world! The aspect of death as it approaches is cold and repulsive. There is no disposition connected with it but that of apathy or of reluctance! While in the other instance, as nature's strength ebbs away, there is found a meek resignation to the sacred will of God, there is found a clinging to him for peace and pardon, a flight into his arms of grace and mercy, a calm acceptance of all his promises, a glad anticipation of his unpolluted rest, an elevating assurance that the grave will be his asylum until the morning of the resurrection, when he shall hear the voice of Christ, and shall come forth in all the maturity of love and gratitude, to partake of the fulness of joy for evermore! With such views, he welcomes death and breathes his latest sigh! Thus both die, both lose what earth can yield, both are mingled with the same dust. But, Oh, what a contrast between their moral conditions! Over the *one*, humanity may shed her bitterest tears, over the *other*, angels may pour forth their song of joy. On the sleeping dust of that righteous

one the eye of God is fixed, while his perfect memory yet retains the imperishable record, "I will raise it up at the last day."

II. That last day is in fact THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE AFTER STATE TO WHICH THE PROPHET NEXT ALLUDES. Into its import let us briefly inquire, "Let my last end be like his." We are told that if "the wages of sin be death, *the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.*" "If in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me shall never die." "I go and prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change these vile bodies that he may fashion them according to his glorious body, by that mighty working whereby he subdueth all things unto himself." "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the

• voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be for ever with the Lord.”

These passages of scripture are so many positive and distinct testimonies to the resurrection of the righteous from the grave, to the recovery of life and consciousness in the immediate presence of their Saviour, and in the eternal society of each other. These expressions fully assert the *felicity* of this future life, and attest its *everlasting* duration. They affirm the glory of the Redeemer to be the glory of his servants, and the heritage of Christ's joy to be the heritage which he has provided for them. Of this new life, sorrow and imperfection, sin and suffering form no ingredients. Here the hand of God has wiped away every tear, and removed every pain. Here is no more curse, but rather unbroken love, uninterrupted peace, unremitted service, unalloyed felicity. Man was formed for God, and here God is at length presented to his view face to face. Now he knows even as he is known. Now the joyful union of his affections with the loftiest and greatest object is effected, and this unqualified by any dread of their future separation. His soul is happy, and this happiness

is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. In the full harmony of all his faculties, and in the clear vision of glory, he now celebrates that social and high act of perpetual worship. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, unto him be honour, and blessing, and praise, henceforth, even for ever."

III. Such is *the last end* of the *righteous*! We have yet to notice THE WISH OF THE PROPHET TO PARTAKE BOTH THIS PREVIOUS DEATH AND THIS HIS AFTER RESURRECTION, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It is utterly impossible that a single sentence should comprise a loftier wish. It is the choice of the noblest good, the desire after the richest gain. As if he had said, "Since death is my allotted portion, let me sleep at least in the sepulchres of the righteous. Since eternal life is his destined gift, let me awake from the dust cheered by the same accents which shall denote his slumbers passed, and his resurrection to immortality accomplished!" And Oh, that every soul who may know the prophet's history, may at length breathe forth the prophet's aspiration!

There are, however, religious feelings which rise to a certain point and then die away for

ever. There are convictions which make a man tremble, and are then drowned in the vortex of passion. There are anticipations of celestial blessedness, keen, bright and blissful to the soul, which are ~~exchanged for the~~ perturbations of sense, and for the delirium of the world? Such feelings, such convictions, such anticipations touched the imagination of Balaam as he pourtrayed the spiritual glories of Israel. But the world clung around his heart, and dragged him down to perdition! The man "whose eyes were open," the man to whom the "visions of the Almighty" were vouchsafed, the man who instructed others in the estimate of *life*, himself practically chose *death*, and perished amidst the light which blazed upon his path! Oh, what is the value of knowledge without sentiment, what is religious impulse without sincerity and without love? It is the conversion of the heart to God, it is the recovery of the affections for God, it is the choice of an infinite good in preference to transitory objects; it is the return of the forlorn and the outcast to the bosom and the home which they had quitted, it is the pursuit of holiness as the basis and superstructure of happiness, it is the intercourse of the soul with Christ, and the hourly preparation for his fuller friendship, it is the conformity of the will to the immutable will of God, it is this, and this

alone, which constitutes religion! Dull wishes, feeble resolutions, indolent efforts, which end but in worldliness and vanity, a cold approbation of virtue, which mocks the heart even while it utters its applause, all this is delusion and death. Sincerity and truth can alone prevail. When these are found, the remedy is sure, the succour is adequate. Guilty as may be the conscience, polluted as may have been the affections, inveterate as may have been the disease, the gospel record is yet unlimited and clear, “Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, come and buy without money and without price.” “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” “Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red as crimson they shall be white as wool.” “I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, return unto me for I have redeemed thee.”

Are *we* then conscious that we are morally defiled, and do we feel ourselves to be miserable, and weak, and inconstant? Are we conscious that we cannot come into contact with the thought of death and eternity, without some degree of dismay and alarm? Do our affections, clinging round the sordid and low

objects of sense, fall back upon themselves wounded, and torn, and disappointed? Have we sought peace and joy on earth, and have we found in their place vanity and vexation of spirit? Oh let us survey this heritage of the righteous, his life of peace, his death of hope, his resurrection to endless glory! And let us remember, that to *us, even to us*, is all this good proposed. The “righteous” are not the innocent, but the guilty pardoned, the “righteous” are not the spotless, but the polluted cleansed in the Saviour’s blood, the “righteous” are not the perfect, but the erring restored and the diseased healed!

Say then, is not Christianity the medicine which our case requires, the balm which our lacerated bosoms seek? Let us accept the mercy, let us yield to the grace, let us contemplate the love of him who speaks to us from the cross. He longs to make us happy. He speaks to our hopes and to our fears, to our affections and to our sympathies. He tells us there are principles of evil which exclude their possessor from the approach of good, while there are principles of good, which will protect their possessor from the assault of evil. Oh what is the gospel but the *anxious* voice of warning to forsake the one, and the *generous* voice of invitation to pursue the other! Let us listen and live for ever. Is not the cause high

and holy? Is it not associated with eternity? We shall soon die, we shall soon descend into the solitude of the grave, we shall see no more the face of man, or the glitter of the world! Oh, will the beams of hope fall upon our tombs? will the dust there enclosed be the sacred deposit which a Saviour is engaged to protect? And will it one day rise at the bidding of that mighty voice "incorruptible and undefiled?" Say who can hear these questions thus touching his eternity unconcerned?

Everlasting Saviour! give us wisdom, give us feeling, give us courage, give us grace, give us pardon, give us life; form us to the character of thy children. Break all our bonds, remove all our doubts, heal all our wounds, comfort all our sorrows, and amidst the wreck of earth, give us to discern the felicity of heaven! Amen, Amen.

SERMON X.

THE CONSTANCY AND TENDERNESS OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH xlii. 4.

“HE SHALL NOT FAIL NOR BE DISCOURAGED, TILL HE HATH SET JUDGMENT IN THE EARTH, AND THE ISLES SHALL WAIT FOR HIS LAW.”

THE origin, growth, and perfection of religion in the human heart is the subject, of all others, of the deepest interest and importance. Other topics are interesting, only as they have more or less some relation to this. Subjects of mere human science may occupy and embellish the passing hour, but they can add but little eventually to our happiness. They may shield us for a moment from the gaze of that truth, whose keener inspection would dispel the illusions by which we are surrounded; but they affect this only to render the ultimate discovery of our condition more surprising and afflictive. Hence the circumstances which bring us into contact with religion, influence directly our real happiness. Yet how slow are we to perceive this truth! What obstacles do we place in the

path to our peace ! With what reluctance do we yield to the religious convictions which sometimes fasten upon our minds ? With what resistance and impatience do we meet the darker dispensations of Providence which are yet calculated to detach us from this world, and to lead our thoughts to heaven ! Who but God could bear with the frowardness and the fretfulness, and “ the contradiction ” of our conduct against himself ?

Among the qualities of the divine mind which revelation discloses to us, surely no one is more remarkable than this long-suffering and this patience ! “ The Lord is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

How exquisitely beautiful is the description given by the prophet Isaiah in connection with the passage before us, of the tenderness and constancy of God the Saviour ! “ Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth, I have put my Spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles, he shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he hath judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law.”

Let us employ the present moment in the consideration of the last clause of this prophetic record, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he hath set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law." These expressions are the more remarkable, as uttered by Jehovah himself in reference to the promised Messiah. Of him it is emphatically said, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." He shall proceed in his hallowed work of mercy with unbroken constancy and with unwearied kindness. He came into the midst of us "strong to save," and perhaps this patient endurance of our perverseness is the mightiest weapon which his hands can wield! In further elucidation of this subject, let us consider,

I. THE OBSTACLES WHICH JESUS CHRIST MEETS IN HIS WORK OF KINDNESS TO MAN.

II. THE PATIENCE WITH WHICH HE ENCOUNTERS THOSE OBSTACLES, and

III. THE VICTORY OVER THEM WITH WHICH HIS EFFORTS WILL ULTIMATELY BE CROWNED.

I. The assurance that *Jesus Christ will not fail nor be discouraged*, implies that *he will meet with much to discourage him*, that his work will be inconceivably difficult and painful. We may advert to these obstacles as they are *general*, as they attach to man under all circumstances. In what a state did Jesus Christ find the earth? "His own people" were involved

in such pride and earthliness, that although his advent had been amongst them the subject of prophecy during many hundreds of years, yet, when at length he visited them they scorned his instructions, and resisted his claims! “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” The *Gentile* nations were universally lying in darkness and the shadow of death, “without hope and without God.” What a world to visit, what a race to address, what a work to accomplish!

But waving this view of the subject, let us direct our attention rather to the *individuals* of our race. Let us advert rather to the obstacles which any single human being presents to Christ when he comes forth in the power of his grace to seek and to save!

Let any man look into his own heart, let him advert to *the nature and bent of his inclinations, to his indisposedness to receive instruction, and to the use which he makes of that instruction when received*, and he will be at no loss to discover the difficulties which lie in the path of his deliverer.

1. *What is the bent of his inclinations?* Whither run his affections? what is the tendency of his will? of what character are his moral instincts? He is an earthly creature. He may be more or less intellectual in his pursuits, but he is still earthly and sensual. He desires earthly

objects as the means of his enjoyment. He lives to himself, not to his Maker. His relation to his Creator is, in his mind, a tie of opinion rather than a bond of allegiance—an indistinct notion, not a ground of affection. The unwatched and natural tendency of his mind, is to his own immediate pleasures and not to God's wishes. This unholy selfishness is the principle which puts into motion human activity. Here is the source of ambition, of the love of fame, of the grosser gratifications of sense, of the purer enjoyments of science, of the noisy pursuits of power, of the tranquil delights of domestic life. Various as are the aspects of human passion and of human pursuit, this principle is common to them all, *the love of self in opposition to the love of God*. In accordance with the will of God, that love of self would be innocent; its opposition to that will, constitutes its guilt. It is the direct character of religious conversion, "none of us liveth to himself." Until this period in the existence of every man, "he does live to himself." His motives are narrow and base, his aim is sordid and limited. He is more or less proud, selfish, and independent, corrupt, feeble, and insufficient. Yet he acts and judges as if he were pure, mighty, and adequate to sustain the burden of his own happiness. His thoughts move within the scanty range of visible objects,

or, if they go beyond this range, it is in the way of philosophical speculations, which bring back a tribute of homage to his own capacity and to his own importance. To raise, to dignify, to aggrandize himself, or his family, or his country, or, at the best, to connect himself with the divine Being in order to fortify his perception of personal dignity and security, this is the sum total of his practical inclinations and efforts. What obstacles are here to Christianity; to the reception of the records of Christ! How ill does this self-importance accord with the required confession, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" How ill-suited is his earthly aim to the required promotion of God's glory! This worldliness of mind to the culture of heavenly love! How opposed is this notion of merit and of excellence, to that poverty of soul which belongs to the ransomed of the Lord, whereby they seek their sufficiency in the blood of the Lamb and in the power of his grace!

What a wall of separation does this unholy selfishness build up between God and man! what bulwarks against the progress of truth and righteousness does this sensuality erect in the human breast! Here are all the elements of falsehood, pride, delusion, and rebellion which the powers of darkness use as the medium of their tyranny over this portion of God's intelligent creatures—here are forged the

heavy chains of evil which bind down to continued revolt and death, those whom sin hath already deluded and defiled !

What strong-holds must be demolished, what fierce animosities must be subdued, ere the dominion of Christ can be established in any human soul ! “ Except ye be converted and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” These are obstacles which the arm of omnipotence alone can overthrow !

2. But consider further, the *indisposedness of man to receive instruction*. How vast is the daily *influence* of all this pride and worldliness upon the mind. How gigantic are the efforts which they exert to betray the soul’s best interests, by confounding the distinctions of good and of evil, by blinding the understanding, and by enslaving the affections ! “ There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, although the end thereof is death.” We have no disposition honestly to seek truth, or to retrace our steps to the paths of godliness. “ We love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil.” The approach of spiritual light is painful to us. Religious instruction alarms rather than delights our minds. The perception of obligation to gratitude, and to service for God is slowly and painfully acquired. Our corrupt and earthly minds resist

the admission of God's claims. We turn away from any voice which speaks from heaven, because we suspect its accents to be harsh to our diseased ears. We love the sounds which lull, and the counsels which gratify our passions. "Like the deaf adder, we refuse the voice of the true charmer, charm he never so wisely." Prejudice and scorn steel the mind against the approach of truth. Hence "we hate to be reformed, and cast God's covenant behind us."

3. But observe again, *The use which we make of instruction when actually received.* Even when by the grace and power of God, we have yielded to the claims of reason and religion, even when by true conversion of heart we have turned to God, how severe oftentimes is the conflict between conscience and inclination? What inconsistency, irresolution are visible in our daily conduct! How prone to let go the truth and to take up error! How ready to depart from the simplicity of faith, and to act upon the report of our senses, or upon the scanty experience of our own minds! What obstacles still does even the renewed heart oppose to the progress of truth and godliness! With what unequal steps do we advance along the paths of heavenly science! Into how many bye-roads do we turn! What dulness to discern, and what indolence to pursue the *whole* will and *counsel*

of God. Still may it be affirmed, even of the upright, “Oh fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” “Oh that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the depths of the sea.”

Now let this bent of the human mind, this indisposition to receive instruction, and this imperfect use made of instruction when received; let these circumstances be considered, and the obstacles in the way of Christ will appear inconceivably great.

II. BUT WITH WHAT PATIENCE AND TENDERNESS DOES HE MEET ALL THESE OBSTACLES. With what constancy does he pursue his gracious object, amidst all the difficulties by which it is encompassed! “*He shall not fail nor be discouraged!*” He himself acts upon the principle by which he cautioned others. “He counted the cost” ere he engaged in the work of redemption. He fully understood the human character; He had already measured all its feebleness; He had looked into the darkest recesses of its depravity; He had traced all the windings of its self deception, and had anticipated all the baseness of its ingratitude! He came upon an errand of mercy, and though in the fulfilment of this errand he encountered the sharp attacks of hostile scorn—“Away with such a man from the earth”—yet his pa-

tience and his goodness were already prepared with the answer, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

And what has been the history of his providence and grace from that hour to the present time? Blasphemed by some, neglected by others, attacked by foes, and betrayed by friends, He remains "the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" alike unchanged in his counsels of peace, and unwearied in his efforts to enlighten and to save! His religion has grappled with and overthrown the polytheism of ancient nations, and like the sun in the heavens, still shines around, the common, though often rejected property of a ruined world! Into how many a cold, reluctant, and rebellious heart has his gospel at length forced its way, and shed a late, though lasting peace over the tumults of conscience, and over the perturbations of passion! What a history of forbearance and of compassion on the part of God, would the secret but detailed memoirs of individuals compose! How long did they hold out against the dictates of conscience! How long did they resist the kindly whispers of that Spirit which testified for God, and pointed out the road to wisdom and to joy! How perversely and obstinately did they prefer the gratifications of sense to the testimony of a cleansed heart! the delirium of a moment to

the enlightened anticipations of eternity! And yet God quitted not his hallowed purpose in their behalf! He pursued them with mingled chastisements and mercies. He brought them into difficulties. He humbled them by sadness. He threw a cloud, again and again, across their path, and defeated, in severe mercy, the projects of their folly and of their sin! During many a long year, "he suffered their manners," and pitied their errors, and took not vengeance on their crimes! He followed, as the good Shepherd, the wanderers of his flock, and brought them at last rejoicing to the fold! And since the sacred moment when they yielded themselves to his decisions; when, in some small measure, they comprehended his love, admired his wisdom, gloried in his cross, and identified his service with their truest happiness; even since that moment, with what inconsistency and irresolution have they often pursued the course marked out for their steps! Yet has He not been discouraged. Many waters of ingratitude have not quenched his love. "For his own name's sake He restored them," and He still lives to save. He leaves them not uncorrected, but rather takes vengeance "on their inventions;" yet his eye is upon them for good. He has purchased them with his blood, and he will break every chain that enslaves them to Satan and to the world. He will finish

his work in righteousness, and will “purify to himself a people zealous of good works.” He has paid a vast price for their ransom; and he will be eternally magnified in their deliverance. “He will not fail nor be discouraged.” His ways may be mysterious to human policy, and to human shortsightedness. His cause may sometimes seem to retrograde. His arm may sometimes seem to slumber in its might, and his providence to want the decision and simplicity of human schemes; but his career of mercy will one day reach its close, to the confusion of his adversaries, and to the felicity of his children!

Viewed separately, perhaps, many events may appear contradictory to his purpose, and hostile to the interests of his people; but under the silent and strong controul of an unseen agency, the complicated system of this world’s occurrences is ultimately “working together for good;” and what his servants “discern not now, they shall clearly discern hereafter.”

III. THIS ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF HIS GRACE, it remains for us briefly to notice. “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, until he hath set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law.”

Dark as are yet the habitations of the earth; numerous as are the strong-holds of idolatry on

the one hand, and of superstition on the other; yet the day is promised when truth shall brighten every land, and when religion shall have dominion over a willing and converted world! "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ;" and the children of his grace shall be "as the dew spread over all the earth." How cheering is this prospect to the eye that aches with the sight of wretchedness and of crime! How gladdening this assurance to the mind, perplexed and beat down with the triumph of external oppression, and with the conflict of internal evil! "Fret not thyself against the ungodly, for he shall soon be cut off," and his name shall be forgotten; but "mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the *end* of that man is peace!" And it is in reference to the completion of God's work of love upon the *individual heart* that the subject assumes to us the deepest interest. If towards his redeemed servant, Jesus Christ has been hitherto compassionate and indulgent; if amidst all his inconstancy, Jesus Christ has not been discouraged, but has still "received him graciously and loved him freely," it is with the intention to cleanse him from all iniquity, and ere long to "present him faultless before God's presence with exceeding joy." It is with the

intention to finish the work of regeneration in his soul, and to number him with “the spirits already made perfect.”

It is a consideration full of encouragement to an honest mind, which trembles under a sense of exceeding weakness, as well as unworthiness, that salvation is thus of *free grace*; that redemption is a settled and deliberate plan of mercy to bless and to save the wretched and the lost; that Christ is the mediator of an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and that God has connected the manifestation of his own glory with the deliverance of his people from the captivity of sin. It is “by the church,” says the apostle; that is, by the myriads rescued from the chains of darkness and of death, that the wisdom of God is to be revealed to the universe.

Now to him who knows his own heart—to him who has been enabled by a divine light and influence, to fathom the depths of his own weakness and ingratitude; it is to him in the moment of entire sincerity, when he casts himself upon Christ for mercy; it is to him a subject of inconceivable consolation, that God is faithful to the covenant of his Son, and that no arm as mighty as the arm of his Saviour can be lifted for his destruction! The heart that desponded is thus encouraged; the struggle that seemed hopeless is renewed with alacrity; the love of

the Redeemer diffuses itself over the bosom, and the soul exclaims, with a force and courage not its own, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

And in the pure realms of a *higher* world, what a theme for meditation—what grounds for wonder and for surprise, will this faithful constancy, this never to be discouraged kindness, this unbroken series of deliberate acts of mercy on the part of God, afford to such a soul! From those secure and sacred abodes, to look back along the line of providence; to mark the fidelity which interposed to save amidst dangers and amidst crimes; to contemplate the complex operation of events, of society, of friendship, of instruction, of afflictions, of deliverances; to contemplate the operation of these and various other circumstances, upon the heart; to behold the numerous paths, many intricate and many rugged, which led to one asylum of rest and of truth; to associate this eternal repose, and this eternal joy, with the humiliation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and with his intercession for his people before the everlasting throne; oh what subjects here for admiration, gratitude, and praise! Yes, “unto him that hath loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood; unto him

be glory, and honour, and dominion, and blessing, henceforth, even for ever."

But what is the direct and special appeal which this subject ought to carry to *our* hearts? Do *we* understand these dealings of God? Are we conscious of this unwearied activity on God's part for our eternal welfare? Have we recognised the hand that has protected, and the heart that has poured forth its riches of grace to shelter and to save us? Is this mystery of kindness open to our view? Have we believed on this Saviour; and have we fled to him as to the single rock on which we can survive the impending storm? And if so, to what conclusion does this decision bring us? Oh, is it not to redeem the time that remains—to love our benefactor more warmly, and to serve him more devotedly? Is it not to meet the dispensations of his goodness with energy and with confidence? Is it not to take courage, and to throw ourselves afresh into the combat with evil, carrying "faith as a shield," and "hope as the helmet of salvation?" The struggle with worldly influences, with sensual allurements, with satanic suggestions, may be laborious; but to the honest soul, the issue is decisive, the victory is certain. Greater is he that is for us, than he that is against us! And we are already compassed about with a glorious cloud of witnesses, **who** have passed through the same

conflict, and have triumphed through the same blood of the Lamb !

But on the other hand, are we still averse to the decisions of God ? Are we opposed in principle and practice to the purity of his moral government ? Are we uninfluenced and untouched by every allurements of his goodness, and by every chastisement of his severity ? Are the wonders of redeeming love too insignificant in our esteem to win the homage of our gratitude and affection. Are we still alive to the world and dead to God ? Anxious for a fleeting heritage, but reckless of a crown of glory ? Are we still labouring to overpower the upbraidings of conscience, and to buoy up our hope for eternity by delusions which death will soon dissolve ? What then will be the final lot of those who have set at nought so many counsels, rejected so many invitations, and frustrated the design of so many providences ? Oh, who can tell the amount of that wretchedness which is the last result of insulted mercy, and of despised love ?

SERMON XI.

THE CHARACTER OF ENOCH.

HEB. xi. 5.

“BY FAITH ENOCH WAS TRANSLATED THAT HE SHOULD NOT SEE DEATH; AND WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD HAD TRANSLATED HIM: FOR BEFORE HIS TRANSLATION HE HAD THIS TESTIMONY THAT HE PLEASED GOD.”

IF the scriptures be rich in the discoveries they make to us of the character and moral qualities of God, they are likewise rich in the portraits which they exhibit of men, who by a divine influence, became themselves the imitators of these qualities. Religion, thus has been embodied in human action, and the practicability of real godliness, has been made apparent to mankind. The eleventh chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews is a bright roll of high characters, which reflect the radiance of piety, and which shine like fixed stars in the dark expanse of human life. We have selected the brief history of one of these individuals, as

the subject of the present discourse. The materials of his history are indeed scanty, but they are full of meaning. Entreating the blessing of God upon the consideration of this history, let us remark,

I. THE CHARACTER OF ENOCH.

II. HIS HIGH REWARD.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF HIS FAITH BOTH UPON HIS CHARACTER AND HIS REWARD.

I. Let us advert to the CHARACTER OF ENOCH. The apostle tells us, "that before his translation, he had this testimony, THAT HE PLEASED GOD. The book of Genesis informs us, "that he walked with God;" and the Epistle of Jude further tells us, that he exercised the office of a prophet—that he lifted up his awful voice in the conflict between truth and error, and disclosed the future advent of the Lord from heaven to terminate the terrific controversy. "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among men, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

These brief notices of Enoch tell us, and that very emphatically, that he struggled with the evil of the world; that he walked with God; that he pleased God; and that, in those

early days, he yet anticipated the last advent of the Messiah, to throw eternal light upon the dark subject of good and evil, and to fasten effectual convictions upon the minds, both of the opponents of the one, and the abettors of the other.

Now the *basis* of his character appears to be this, that *he walked with God*. The term is very expressive. It seems to imply *a just knowledge of God*. We cannot, with any degree of intelligence or co-operation, walk or associate with a character which we do not know. Knowledge is essential to veneration and to intimacy. "They that *know* thy name will put their trust in thee." The earthly and sensual dispositions of men soon led them to forget the claims of God, and to sever themselves from the obligations under which they were laid to love and obey him. Idolatry rapidly overspread the world, and it became a scene of moral darkness, violence, and crime. Men became, to every practical purpose, no better than atheists, living without God in the world. They lost their hold on that which was bright and good, and clung deliberately and fatally, to that which was dark and degrading. To some few God still revealed himself. Some, like Enoch, knew the character of God, and their interest in that character. Some felt the emptiness of their own resources, the degradation of their nature, and the in-

adequacy of earth to make them happy. They sought the knowledge of God, and found it to be "the beginning of wisdom." They felt it to be their best heritage. Forlorn, guilty, dying, God was their peace, their shelter, their refuge. He revealed himself to their souls, as "their shield, and their exceeding great reward." They linked their hopes to his promises, and expected "the Lord from heaven." Doubtless, through sacrifices and direct revelation, they knew that "their Redeemer lived," and that their rescue from sin and death was ultimately safe in his omnipotent hands. They were thus prodigals "returned to their Father and their Friend." They, in part at least, understood his designs of mercy, and were proportionately influenced by them. But the term, "walked with God," implies farther *intimacy or familiarity with God*. The result of divine knowledge is to produce and excite confidence in God; and the expression, *walk with God*, seems to mark out a holy fellowship, accompanied with delight and affection towards God. Enoch walked with God as his friend. There was no voluntary barrier erected between God and his soul. A knowledge of God had annihilated the distance between him and God, and had attracted him to his friendship and intercourse. How harmonious with this result of divine knowledge, is

that fine avowal of Moses, " Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place from one generation to another." Separate from God, we are as houseless outcasts, without defence, without honour, without succour. Intercourse with God at once enriches us with a home, a protector, a companion, a heritage, an asylum. The storm is abroad, and death ravages around, but we have peace within, and the sure promise of friendship and immortality. Thus Enoch lived or walked with God—the nearness of God to his soul was his daily happiness. He confided in his strength; he reposed on his wisdom; he sheltered beneath his mercy; he claimed the covert of his wing, until the tyranny of sorrow should be overpast. A just view of God's attributes disarmed guilt of its sting, and sadness of its power. " Where is God, my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" Never was expression more happy, or more descriptive of fellowship and delight in God. Where is he, who in the dark midnight of this wilderness world, can light up my path, and teach me the mirthful song of praise? Where is he who knows all my dangers and my fears; and who can save me from the one, and lull to rest the other? Where is he whose grace and love are my confidence and my strength? Where is he who remembers that I am but dust, and will himself clothe me with

force and courage to meet my lot, however dark and severe? Tell me where I may find him, that he may walk the companion of my way, and be the rejoicing of my heart?" It was thus that Enoch walked with God.

But we shall still leave the expression unexplained, if we add not, that to walk with God implies *agreement and conformity of mind with God*. It is a question which lies upon the page of revelation, "can two walk together except they be agreed." Friendship is founded upon a similarity of principles, objects, aims, and tastes. It springs from the same estimate of good and evil, and from the same object being presented to the affections. To walk with God, is hence to think with God, to judge with God, to taste with God, to adopt his decisions, to love his plans, to approve his aims, and to pursue his objects. To do God's will, becomes the very "meat" and nutriment of the soul. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." A parent loves the tribute and homage of the heart in his intercourse with his children; and if God be a father, acts he upon other principles than those with which he endues his creatures? Enoch then was one with God in his pleasures and pursuits. Under the view of God's excellence on the one hand, and of his own folly and deficiencies on the other, he had taken the determination to follow God, and to adopt his

will in all things. He now judged of the world and of its varied objects, according to the standard which God had erected. He now connected time and all its interests, with the interests of eternity. He now deemed conformity to God's counsel, and to God's character, to be the point of truth and elevation which he must ever reach in order to attain to dignity and happiness. He desired now to live to God, to glorify God, to use his faculties of knowledge, and activity, and enjoyment in the service of God, and with a direct aim to please him. He felt his calamity to have been disagreement with God. He felt the conflict of passion with conscience to have been just the greatest scourge by which the heart can be torn. He felt that with his finite resources, and with God's multiplied claims to his gratitude and affection, to live at enmity with his benefactor, and to disown those claims, was just to lay bare his bosom to every the worst assailant of his peace—was just to hurry into ultimate wretchedness, and to covet the very perdition of his comfort. It was in a return of the affections to the object most worthy to attract them—it was in the reception of God's truth by his understanding, and in the admission of God's light into his heart, that he could alone gain felicity and repose. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "I would have no

will but thine." "Thou art too wise to err, and too good to be unkind;" and I would use my every effort of judgment, and my every movement of heart, to follow thy decisions, and to assimilate my character to thy purity and love." Thus Enoch walked with God.

In estimating farther the character of Enoch, we must refer to the testimony which he received, that he *actually pleased God*. His religion was not a speculation or a theory, which he took up to-day, and laid down to-morrow. It was not the vain dream of enthusiasm, which is founded on no steady and tried principles of reason, by which he was actuated. It was not the momentary impulse which induced him to take God's side to-day, and which left him at liberty to desert it to-morrow. It was rather a religion of reason, and deliberation; a religion of faith in the divine character and promises; a religion which influenced, and guided, and sustained him, at one moment as at another. It was the allegiance of the heart, flowing from the decisions of the understanding. It was the obedience and homage of the soul. It was the tribute of dependence, gratitude, and love. It was the sacrifice of the whole man, a reasonable and acceptable service. Probity, and truth, and righteousness, were its bright results. Hence Enoch pleased God—God graciously owned his allegiance, and accepted his inter-

course. His aim was to please God, and it was accepted as such. He was the child of mercy, the disciple of truth and charity. Whatever might be the judgment which men formed of his character, God was ready to avow, "well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord." It must likewise be considered, in the character of Enoch, that he *openly combated the evils of irreligion*. He stood forth, like Elijah in after days, the intrepid champion and prophet of the Lord. He endured the struggles of reproach and contempt, and boldly met and resisted the tide of surrounding ungodliness. He was instructed to utter the solemn warnings of God, and to assure the profligate and the impenitent of the future day of retribution. His allegiance to God was not the calm and timid adherence to duty where no temptation could excite alarm, and no sacrifice could extort regret. His attachment to the cause of righteousness was not the cheap offering of solitary piety, and of retired meditation. He walked with God amidst the oppositions of the ungodly. He combated evil in the fore-front of the battle, and upheld the sacred cause which the world had contemned and abandoned. He looked beyond the confines of temporal applause, and earthly prosperity, and rested his hopes upon the allotments of eternity. The judgment of

the great day pressed upon his mind. The final overthrow of irreligion, and the perdition of its adherents, were recorded before him. He struck the deep and awful tones of prophecy, as in the presence of the Lord, amidst his ten thousand attendant saints. He saw the result of a controversy with God, and taught the sceptic and the scorner to anticipate their fearful doom. Thus a firm and manly resistance to the current maxims and habits of an ungodly world, was connected in his character with the more sacred and unseen devotion which "walked with God" in secret meditation and prayer. How unspeakably valuable had been the detailed biography of such a man. If the brief outline be so interesting, what had been the full delineation !

II. But from this imperfect sketch of the character of Enoch, let us pass on to HIS HIGH REWARD.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him."

"The wages of sin is death." "Death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." But he who hath awarded the penalty is able to exempt from its infliction. Two instances of exemption, and but two, one in the old world, and one in the new, are recorded for our instruction and consolation. Enoch and Elijah

passed from this world to a better, through other gates than those of death. They were champions for God, and he was pleased to confer on them this high distinction. Of Enoch we have already remarked, that "he received this testimony, that he pleased God." His conduct was consistent with his principles; his devotedness was affectionate and habitual. He walked during three centuries in familiar and hallowed communion with God. What traces almost of visible elevation and glory, would rest upon the very features of such a saint! How would each succeeding act of intercourse with his God stamp deeper the impressions of truth and of charity upon his heart! How weaned from the gross and selfish habits of the world, would that mind become with which, through three long centuries, God himself had deigned to converse! How multiplied would be the ties, how touching and holy the associations, which would now link his affections to a higher scene! Imagine three entire centuries passed in communion with God, in agreement with his aims, in conformity to his will, in expectation of his felicity. A heavenly glory rested upon the face of Moses, after forty days intercourse with heaven. But during three hundred years Enoch walked with God! Perhaps we shall scarcely wonder if such a character be ripe for glory, if such a man be

translated from earth amidst the gratulations of attending angels? We shall scarcely wonder, if as in the case of Elijah in after days, the chariot of fire and the horses of fire be his triumphant conveyance to the realms of bliss! Such honour God bestowed upon his servant; he was no longer “found” on earth. By a sudden act of grace and power, he was placed beyond the reach of human insult or of human sorrow. The pathways of life were still thronged by the vicious or the sad. But Enoch was not found amongst them! “He was *not*, for God took him.” “The corruptible had put on incorruption, the mortal had put on immortality.”

III. It remains for us to notice THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH BOTH UPON HIS CHARACTER AND REWARD.

“By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death;” and it is added, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith, then, forms the character which God approves, and faith prepares and qualifies the soul for a translation to a purer world. And this is very intelligible. We are influenced by the opinions, the facts, the events, the expectations with which we are habitually conversant. If these be sensual, external, earthly, we are necessarily earthly and sensual in the texture and habits of our minds. Our hopes and fears, our tastes and pleasures will belong to time, and sense, and

earth. If, on the other hand, our hopes and fears, our pleasures and our anticipations be inward, intellectual, spiritual, heavenly and eternal, our characters will correspond with these hopes; our pleasures will be associated with this eternity. Now all that is spiritual and eternal is derived to us from the sources of knowledge comprised in the testimonies of God. We can know of their existence only by our belief of the records which contain them. It is therefore evident, that faith is the medium of our communication with a higher world. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith in God's assurances connects us directly with God. Faith in the realities of the celestial world makes us incessantly conversant with those realities. For the faith of a Christian is not occasional, as that belief which a man has in an historical fact, of which he will never perhaps think again; but it is *habitual*, referring to objects which are as dear to him at one moment as at another; to objects to which his whole destiny and happiness are eternally united. Hence the faith of a Christian gradually moulds his character, forms the pathways along which his thoughts move, and presents objects to which his affections cling. He is actually healed, saved, blessed, through the medium of his faith. Thus by faith it was that Enoch walked with

God. He credited the assurances and intimations of God to his soul, and felt all their benignant influence upon his character. God thus became at once the object of his love and of his imitation. This process is attested by the apostle John, when he says, "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" In other words, "He who credits the history of the cross, who comprehends and believes its moral meaning, quits his grasp of the world, and seeks his repose in God. For what does that cross teach him? that earth is vain and sin destructive, and Christ the way, the truth, and the life." Hence the victory over the world is achieved. Faith is thus no mystery; it is the exercise of the purest reason. It is God's decision set against the solicitations of sense, and truly and cordially preferred. It is true that this faith is, in every case, the gift of God, for it is only a spiritual mind which can truly comprehend spiritual objects; and we cannot believe when we do not comprehend: our knowledge will always be the limitation of our belief; we can therefore only believe in spiritual realities as they are made the objects of our knowledge. It was thus that Enoch believed, and this belief formed his character. The same belief influenced likewise his *trans*

lation to glory, that is, it qualified him for its enjoyments, it rendered him meet for its immeasurable rewards. We can imagine a mind conversant during three centuries with God and eternity, actually a partaker of the very elements which constitute celestial happiness. Eternity, God, salvation, would be names and objects in unison with the hourly existence of such a mind. It must needs pass to glory. The corn was too ripe to remain in the ear, it would shed its seed, it must be gathered to the garner.

But with the God of Enoch, with the faith and expectations of Enoch, is not *our* happiness eternally associated? Ah, do we know his God? Do we share his fellowship? Do we love his cause? Is the world our idol, or is it beneath our feet? Are the allotments of earth our heritage, or have we respect to the recompence of the great reward? Who is our companion through the wilderness and snares of life? With whom do we walk? Whither tend our wishes? Where cling our affections? where repose our expectations? Do we live by faith? Do we credit the divine records? Are we familiar with the great and good of past ages? Are we partakers of their sympathies and of their conflicts? Do we love Christ? Do we serve God? Are we advancing to his rest? Are we conforming to his

will? Are we familiar with the accents of his voice, and delighted with the consolations of his love? Oh, with Enoch, let us “walk with God.” Oh, with David let us exclaim, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me with glory.”

SERMON XII.

LIBERTY OF HEART PRODUCTIVE OF HOLINESS.

PSALM cxix. 32.

“I WILL RUN THE WAY OF THY COMMANDMENTS WHEN THOU
SHALT ENLARGE MY HEART.”

IN these words the psalmist marks out the close connection between *pardon* and *sanctification*. And indeed this is the great theme of revealed religion, and the great subject of benediction to mankind. “Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace.” “We love him because he first loved us.” “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.” These several passages of holy writ contain a combined view of the process by which man, as a fallen being, is now blessed of God. God reveals his character; we are attracted by it, and thus attracted, desire to please our benefactor. We

learn gradually to identify the ideas of obedience and happiness. God becomes the object of our affections. They fasten round God and are satisfied. And this conversion of heart is God's own work. It is effected through the agency of the great Teacher and Comforter. That Comforter ever acts indeed upon the soul through the medium of knowledge, by motives suited to sway an intelligent being; yet is the distinct though silent agent none other than God himself; and the sacred agency is his gratuitous benefit. The expression of the psalmist now before us, is a more brief and compendious delineation of this spiritual healing to man. "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart." As if he had said, "The enlargement of my heart shall be the measure of my obedience. In proportion as I am set free from the contraction of mind induced by sin, I shall increase my desires after conformity to thy will. The knowledge and enjoyment of thy love will gradually perfect me in holiness."

But let us attempt a little farther to elucidate:

I. THE NATURE OF THIS ENLARGEMENT OF HEART.

II. ITS INFLUENCE UPON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.

I. This ENLARGEMENT OF HEART is called

LIBERTY in the other version of the psalms, “ I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt set my heart at liberty.” Under the influence of depraved affections, and under the consequent penalties of the divine law, we may be justly said to be in captivity. The apostle Paul speaks of our being “ sold under sin,” of our being “ servants to uncleanness.” And our Saviour himself declares, that “ whoso committeth sin is the servant of sin,” but “ that if the Son shall make him free, he shall be free indeed.” And as the heart is thus the seat of the disease, it is there that the blessing of liberty is promised ; “ A new heart will I give you.” In reference to this new heart, the law of God is termed “ *the law of liberty.*” The misery and degradation of man mainly lie in the wrong and low objects to which his propensities tend. The injurious effects of sin appear in the depravity of the human will. We have quitted God as the source of our happiness, and our affections lie scattered amidst the baser parts of the creation. We lean no more upon that which is great, and good, and infinite, but upon that which is like ourselves, fragile, and mean, and defiled. We are often, indeed, by the scantiness of the standard by which we judge, deluded to imagine our views to be wide and magnificent. Many can affect to pity the yet more sordid and

narrow sphere occupied by the mere sensualist, and launching forth their minds to the complicated relations of social life, to the balance of power, to the sources of international wealth, or to the pursuits of art and science, dream that they are tracking the widest range of intellectual excellence. Quantities are certainly comparative, and the estimate which such men form of human conduct, may be entirely just under the limited standard which they employ ; but the widest sphere of thought and action, which draws its boundary around merely earthly objects, is essentially narrow and contracted. There is no real expansion short of God. The view is contracted, till it embraces Him; the affections are enslaved till they link themselves to Him. Now it is the design of Christianity to give this enlargement to the view. " I will walk the way of thy commandments, when thou hast set my heart at liberty." Christianity is God's remedy for the guilt and feebleness of man, and it is every way adapted to overtake its aim. An immortal spirit can never be satisfied with that which is narrower and weaker than itself: at the same time, it can never love that which appears repulsive and unlovely. We delight in that which appears to promote our happiness. Now strength and beauty are in God, and in God alone. Every created object is fragile, and can only reflect back a few faint

beams of God's beauty. Hence to become truly happy, it is necessary that we love God, and to love God, it is as necessary that we discern his loveliness. He must become attractive, or we shall not be allured. Now Christianity contains a portraiture of God, which whenever really perceived, cannot fail of being loved. Oh, who can delineate the full attractions of that goodness which induced God "so to love the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Chained down to perpetual conflict with passion, and hourly polluted by the struggle; miserable by the tenure under which we hold all external enjoyment, through the moral constitution of things, we must incessantly have advanced into deeper ruin and into heavier bondage, had not the Son of God himself travelled to earth, and struck off our chains, and unbarred to us the gates of a new and better acceptance with God! This is the amount of the compassion of God! And let it be here observed, that as this deliverance is unclogged by any previous condition, and unlimited to any specific degree of sorrow or sin, it addresses itself to every heart. It is a salvation offered to all "without money and without price." It is thus entirely adapted to our disordered state. It is in fact a moral medicine, which

can successfully contend with the fiercest disease. It is a ransom which can discharge the heaviest debt, and rescue the vilest slave. It is a fountain which can cleanse the crimson stain, and give the pure tint of snow to the crime of scarlet hue. The provisions of this salvation meet every possible want, and apply to every possible variety of defilement and wretchedness. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." It is the universality of its application, which gives the gospel so great a value. A conviction of wretchedness, a perception of guilt, a sensation of utter forlornness suffice, under the agency of the generous Comforter, to bring the most degraded heart into full contact with all its elevating and healing qualities. The state of a revolted world needed a mighty remedy ; and the virtue of the gospel, as ages roll away, still goes forth to heal in all the freshness of its original power, with certain aid, and with unassailable strength ! Every barrier of sin and sorrows falls before it. It conveys the offer of pardon, purity, and life eternal at once to all ranks and degrees of men, and to all ranks and degrees of guilt. It never yet retired baffled in its efforts before any amount of evil how-

ever great. “Whoso findeth me, findeth life.” Now the *discovery* of God’s mercy and tenderness in the gospel, is calculated *to enlarge* the heart or to give liberty to the affections. It tells us *where* to *repose*, by telling us *what* to *love*. It bursts the bubbles by which we have been beguiled, and it directs us to the substantial and attainable sources of felicity. In the emphatic language of the scriptures, it draws “our feet out of the miry clay,” and places them firmly upon the “rock” of ages. It lifts up to our view an infinite good, and teaches us how to pursue it with success. It reveals God to us as a father, friend, and guide. Linked to his holy mercy, we are now safe and happy. Our prospect is bright and serene. Our horizon now expands into infinity. Our heritage and our hopes have become eternal. The cold and narrow heart may now glow and dilate its feelings by aspirations unbounded as the God which gave it such a capacity for bliss. Now the reign and tyranny of sense ceases, and the liberty of God refreshes the soul. This is the gospel. The whole weight of evil, by which we were depressed, is in progress to an entire removal. The gift is positive, large, and generous. “There is no more condemnation.” “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “He has made an end of transgression, and brought in an everlasting righte-

ousness." He has laid the foundations of a benign and mysterious empire wide as the limits of human misery, and durable as the throne of the Almighty. "The sceptre of this kingdom is a right sceptre," and its protection and its riches are alike accessible to all its subjects.

II. But let us now proceed to notice more distinctly, THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THIS LIBERTY OF HEART UPON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF THOSE WHO ENJOY IT.

The psalmist certainly anticipates from its possession a continually progressive obedience, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou hast set my heart at liberty." If this effect indeed were not produced, the whole design of redemption would fail. The intervention of Jesus Christ on our behalf, was to re-produce holy affections in our hearts, by placing before us objects at once attractive and adequate to fill up our capacities of enjoyment. Any salvation, therefore, which left us a prey to sense and passion, would be worthless and delusive. Release a criminal from penalty, and cast him back upon society, with his heart reckless of social rights and actually eager for crime, and what benefit have you conferred on him? You have only given him increased opportunities equally to augment his own misery and the disquietude of others. Any view,

therefore, of pardon and peace with God, which leaves an offender still careless of insult and rebellion against the government of God, is an absurd and worthless system. “Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for thou art my praise.” Nothing short of this is salvation. Now let us dwell for a moment upon the results which may be fairly expected to flow from Christian enlargement of heart, or from the perception of that holy mercy which accompanies the belief of the gospel. In the first place the effect may be supposed to be holy, because the *manifestation* of this plan of mercy to the soul is under the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. It is this pure and gracious agent, who “takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to the soul.” Can it then be questioned whether or not the influence of such a teacher will be benign and healing? But pre-supposing this agency, let us now rather inquire into the *rational* and *natural* results of the spiritual knowledge of God’s character thus communicated to the soul? What then let it be asked, is the sum total of that knowledge, or rather, what are the various and solemn truths of which it is composed? It is not, we reply, simply and *nakedly* stated in the gospel that God is placable, and that pardon is sure. It is not simply stated

overwhelm in ruin the original felicity of man.

But let us go on to ask *what may be expected from an elevated mind*, become conscious, not only of the past results of disobedience, but of the munificent object which God had in view when he sent his Son to die? What are the feelings which may be expected to arise in his heart, who credits the noble sacrifice made by his Saviour, and the intense desire of God to reproduce happiness among the children of men? What is the line of conduct which may be anticipated from him who, wrecked of all things by transgression, sees restoration, hope, and eternal blessedness, deposited in the hands of Christ, for his free use and absolute enjoyment? If man be swayed by reasonable motives, and if the Holy Spirit be the author of those manifestations of truth which Christ promised to the faithful, then *the result, the feeling, the conduct produced* can be none other than gratitude, obedience, love. Yes, it is laid deep in the indestructible nature of things, that love should answer love; that the enlargement of the heart, once contracted by sin, should excite the filial and the generous purpose, "I will run the way of thy commandments." "Thy testimonies have I claimed as my heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart." "O quicken me after thy

loving-kindness, and so shall I keep the testimonies of thy mouth." Perhaps no man ever attained to such strong impressions of the free mercy of God, as the apostle Paul; and certainly no man was ever influenced more strongly *to dedicate himself as a living sacrifice* to the master who had thus loved him. In the path of grateful obedience, no barrier of personal toil, or reproach, or suffering, could arrest his steps. Chains, and imprisonment, and death, were small evils in his sight, who owed all his hope, and peace, and joy to the redemption which Christ had effected on the cross. "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so I may but finish my course with joy; and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

It ought further to be remarked, that this enlargement of heart, by the grace of God, is *continually progressive*, and therefore becomes an *incessant stimulus* to obedience. The more God becomes the object of *knowledge* and of *love*, the more will he become the object of *imitation*. His holy and munificent character will be ever present to the soul. It will learn to live amidst higher and nobler elements than earth-born pleasures can afford. It will breathe a fragrant and ethereal atmosphere, cheered by the light of truth, and refreshed by the antici-

pations of eternity. Such a soul will indeed long after the allotments of that eternity, chiefly in reference to the perfection and maturity of its obedience to the law of love. A man under the influence of these hopes, soars upwards to those purer realms, and antedates at least in wishes, his entire conformity to his master's will. There he will serve without interruption, and love without inconstancy. There his obedience will become one unbroken consecration of all his faculties to God. Oh, delightful thought to the grateful, and free, and blood-bought soul! Believer in Christ! Would'st thou then toil, and work, and obey? Would'st thou be a pattern of good works, un-reproved before God and man? Set thy thoughts continually upon the love, and grace, and generous worth of Christ. Try to measure, although thy short line can never reach it, the depth, and height, and length, and breadth, of that love which hath fearlessly met death, and hell, and sin in awful conflict, and vanquished them in thy behalf! Place before thee all the munificence of his salvation, and all the potency of his healing grace! Remember, that soon, very soon, the veil which hides thee from his farther intercourse, shall be lifted up. Thou art his, and none shall pluck thee out of his hands! Remember this, and the glow of moral activity, shall enter afresh into thine

heart ; the healthfulness of obedience shall put forth all its high pulsations, and thou shalt become a servant, not cold, and calculating, and reluctant ; but a servant, courageous, and free, and faithful, even unto death ! Thou shalt abound in his work, and toil shall become thy rest. But, disciple of low-born pleasure, and bond-slave of sense, what voice of humble intreaty shall be addressed to thy soul ? Hast thou not mistaken thy true interest ? Hast thou not miscalculated the designs, and overlooked the glorious character of God ? Canst thou be happy without his love, or virtuous without conformity to his will ? Oh yet listen to the compassionate accents of his kindness. He is still thy Father, although thou hast cut asunder the sacred bonds of filial attachment. Receive at length his urgent assurances, and meet with gratitude the longings which he hath to make thee happy ! Oh ! ere the period of his clemency be passed, spring up into his arms, and say, “ Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.”

SERMON XIII.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF FAITH.

HEB. xi. 6.

“BUT WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD—FOR HE THAT COMETH TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS, AND THAT HE IS THE REWARDER OF THEM THAT DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM.”

FEW terms in religion have appeared more perplexing than the term, “faith.” Perhaps the reason has been, that it has been supposed to imply more than its apparent signification would actually warrant. It may be useful to inquire into the real import of the word, as well as into its importance in the whole history of religion. In dependence, therefore, upon the divine blessing, we would offer some remarks,

I. UPON THE NATURE OF FAITH IN GENERAL.

II. UPON THE PARTICULAR LIMITATION OF THE TERM IN THE TEXT.

III. UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN REFERENCE TO OUR HABITUALLY PLEASING GOD.

I. Let us first offer some remarks UPON THE NATURE OF FAITH IN GENERAL.

Now the term, faith, “ expresses a confidence or persuasion of the truth of any thing not self-evident, received upon the testimony of another.” Such testimony may be either divine or human. But the confidence and the mode by which it is produced, is the same, in kind, in both cases. To have faith in the subjects of human testimony, requires a certain comprehension of the nature of the subjects, and a confidence in the credibility of the testimony under which those subjects are presented to our knowledge. Our faith will, in every case, depend upon our understanding of the thing testified, and upon our confidence in the truth of the testimony. And if the object be complicated which is presented to our mind, in this case, even though the credibility of the witness be satisfactory, our faith will be more or less confused or clear, according as our minds comprehend, or do not comprehend, the whole of the testimony. Our knowledge is, in every case, the boundary of our belief. To increase that knowledge, supposing the testimony credible, is always to increase our faith. To confuse or to diminish the certainty of our knowledge, is to diminish, and to the same extent contract, the boundary of our faith. Precisely the same circumstances appear to

take place in reference to *divine* testimony. We are satisfied as to the credibility of the testimony—that it comes from God. But the objects presented to us upon that testimony, will become the *actual* objects of our faith, exactly to the extent, and no further, in which we understand them. Our comprehension of the object will always be the limit of our faith; and this faith will diminish or augment in the very degree in which our perception is clear or confused. When therefore the apostles of our Saviour exclaimed, “Lord, increase our faith,” and when the poor man who longed for the healing of his Son, cried out, “Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief;” in both instances a confusion or uncertainty was evidently distressing the mind, as to the full perception of the thing to be credited; and the faith of both parties required to be strengthened; or, in other words, their knowledge, their perception of the truth placed before them by their Lord, required to be made more clear and evident. But it is needful here to remark, that the divine testimony, though depending upon precisely the same process of mind as to its existence, and growth, and contraction, is far more difficult of acquirement and of retention, than faith in human testimony? Is it inquired wherefore? The answer is, that sin has crippled our power of judgment—that sin has deadened the

spiritual sensibility which is absolutely essential to the perception of divine truth. The impurity of our affections actually disqualifies us for the full perception of spiritual objects. The truths of revelation, which is the divine testimony, are very complicated, and are perhaps not to be fully understood during the present life, on account of the moral injury which the affections have received, and which interposes a barrier between the soul and its full contact with the truth set before it. Supposing, therefore, the powers of understanding and of imagination to be equal in any two persons, *He* will comprehend the Christian revelation the most clearly, who has the purest affections, who is in the highest degree detached from human objects, and who is the most conversant with the objects of the heavenly world. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The right state of the heart or of the affections, which is, in fact, the actual disposition to do the will of God, will thus be the measure of our capacity to comprehend the doctrine. The doctrine which appears strange, insipid, irrational, censurable, repugnant, hateful to an unholy state of the affections, will become attractive, seasonable, suitable, exhilarating, to a pure state of the affections. And hence it is, that while numbers assent to the general

import of revelation ; while numbers quite accord as to their judgment of the credibility of Christianity, and as to many parts of its doctrine, they are quite at variance as to their perception of many other parts. The most gross state of moral impurity does not disqualify a man from judging of external evidence, from admitting the truth of the incarnation, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ ; or from receiving the doctrine of immortality, or that of rewards or punishments. These subjects are as simple and as easy to such a mind, as the subject of chemistry, or of political economy. There is nothing in these subjects which the ordinary state of the moral faculties tends, in any considerable degree, at least, to render obscure. Hence, even minds whose affections are in a very deplorable degree depraved, may be tenacious of Christian truth, in all its great outlines, and may even compose treatises in defence of its credibility and general excellence. But such minds can feel little affinity with the more spiritual and moral parts of Christianity. The purity of God ; the evil of sin ; the love of Christ ; the manifestation of that love to the human soul ; the hidden, and secret, and holy intercourse of the heart with God ; the necessity for atonement ; the freeness of divine grace ; the renovation of the heart by the power and compassion of the great Com-

forter! the value and sweetness of prayer; the fervour of gratitude; the desire to be with Christ; the secret calm of confidence in his eternal love—these, and many other subjects embodied in the testimonies of God, are subjects with which an unholy, earthly heart cannot come into full contact. There may be a distant perception, indeed, even of these; but the affections that are low, and worldly, and sensual, cannot perceive them, so as to *taste* their beauty and their value. And such a taste is essential to their perception. A woman, to judge of the full amount of a mother's sensations, must herself be a mother—a kind heart may conjecture, but cannot know maternal pains and pleasures. Hence the Scriptures assert, that the “natural man,” that is, the affections in their natural or earthly state, “cannot comprehend the things of God, for they are spiritually discerned.” And our Saviour declared, that “the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” “It is the pure in heart who can alone see God.” It was the progress of holy affection which thus enabled Job to exclaim, “I have heard of thee, by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” The value which the Scriptures attach to faith, is hence no ground of surprise to him who has felt Chris-

tianity to be dear and healing to his heart. It has been by a divine influence that he has come into contact with the spiritual meaning of Christianity; and his faith in that spiritual meaning has been the medium through which he came into such contact. He is therefore aware that no language can do justice to the worth of faith. He is not surprised, indeed, that a worldly man, who judges of Christianity as he judges of any human science, should attach little importance to faith, because the objects comprised in its history, which have been the actual matters of faith to him, have had no effective or consoling influence upon his mind. Such a man has known the mere outworks, the general aspect of Christianity—such as the moral precepts, the virtuous life of its founder, and the assurances of resurrection and immortality; but he has known nothing of the inner recesses, of the sacred and interior promises, or of the holy and triumphant consolations, of the gospel. He has viewed Christianity only as a rude and indistinct object. He has surveyed its walls, its defences, as a traveller might gaze upon a vast and distant city, who had no real asylum within its bulwarks. Such a man has found no *home* in the gospel; no sweet resting-place for his aching thoughts, within its hallowed enclosures. Between his estimate of it, and the estimate of a

genuine Christian, there is precisely the same sort of difference as between the value attached to the contiguity of a city in the minds of two travellers, one of whom should be but a casual wanderer through its streets, and the other hastening to the sacred spot where all the feelings of love and tenderness have long linked him to the memory of his wife and children. The faith of a real Christian is thus the result of renewed affections. His knowledge is still the *source* and the *boundary* of his faith; but this knowledge has been to him, in very truth, the gift of God; for it has been through the conversion of his affections—through the contrition and sadness of his heart—through the discovery of the love, the patient and costly tenderness of his God and Saviour, that he has come into converse with those parts of Christianity which are properly medicinal and healing to the soul. Faith, therefore, may be justly said, in its more extensive and spiritual operations, to be the gift of God, since it is the result of a knowledge, the growth of holy affections and of a renewed heart. Well therefore might the Psalmist refer to God's *illuminating influence*, and covet its larger measures—"Open thou mine eyes, and I shall see wondrous things in thy law;" and well might he refer to the state of *the moral instincts*, as productive of this divine knowledge. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and

the *meek* will he teach his way." It will thus appear, that to faith belong all the real and essential blessings of Christianity. We come into intercourse with God ; we rest under the shelter of the atonement ; we are renewed in our tastes and inclinations ; we acquire a home, a refuge ; we regard the future as serene and bright ; these blessings we acquire by faith, and by faith only. Nor is there any other conceivable way of embracing all the great and consoling realities of the gospel. Faith is, hence, the confidence of the penitent, and devout, and affectionate heart, as it reposes its weary sensations amidst the gracious assurances of God ! It is the deep and inward cry of the forlorn spirit, " Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place, from one generation to another !" It is farther evident from these statements, that faith will be often *progressive*, and often *retrograde*. Let the true Christian become unduly eager about earthly emoluments ; let him diminish voluntarily the time he passes in secret converse with God ; let him call away his thoughts from the character and friendship of his Saviour ; let him thwart the precious influences of the Holy Spirit—and his faith will necessarily contract its operations ; the finer and more ethereal parts of Christianity will begin to escape, to grow indistinct ; his affections will be disordered ; he will believe *less*,

in reference to God and eternity, than he did before ; his faith will shrink, or will vacillate as to real good and evil. On the other hand, let him grow more familiar with the lofty thoughts and aspirations of the gospel ; let him discover more of the glory of Christ ; let him derive from him larger accessions of holy peace and joy ; let the earth remove farther from his interior fellowship—and heaven, with all its bright anticipations, come into closer union with his understanding and his affections ; and he will necessarily believe *more* of Christianity than he did before—he will know more of its hidden worth, as the increased purity of his affections is throwing down more of the barrier which sin had interposed between his soul and God ; or, which is the same thing, between him and the richer parts of Christianity. These remarks upon faith accord with a fact often noticed in the history of the church of Christ—that many a poor man, without the aids of human science, has come into fuller communion with the gospel, than has the profound theologian and the scholar.

The former has got into the *home* and the *sanctuary* of the gospel—the latter has often been contented to abide among the walls and streets, which he has graphically and ably delineated. “ God hath often,” saith

St. James, “chosen the poor of this world *rich* in faith.” These riches belong rather to the state of the affections, than to the culture and sagacity of the powers of the understanding. Hence, while the more spiritual truths of the gospel have, by the proud, been neglected with scorn, or overlooked with secret disgust; they have been to the humble, “the power of God unto salvation.” And this dispensation called forth the holy admiration of Jesus Christ—“I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and simple, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, because it thus seemed good in thy sight.”

II. Let us now proceed to an inquiry into THE MORE LIMITED SENSE OF THE TERM FAITH, in the passage of scripture before us. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” In the commencement of this chapter, the apostle had defined “Faith to be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And this definition appears to accord exactly with all the preceding observations; for according to this apostle, faith is such a confidence in the testimony of God respecting the eternal felicities which are treasured up for the servants of God,

accompanied by such a perception of their worth as the objects of hope to the soul ; that these felicities, though unseen, become actual subsistences to the mind, and are received by an internal evidence, most healing and satisfactory to the soul. Thus, in consequence of their belief of these realities, “ Noah,” he tells us, “ built his ark amidst the scoffs of the world—Abraham went forth as a stranger and wanderer—Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible—and Enoch walked with God, having this testimony, that he pleased God.” Faith then, in this chapter, has special reference to those tenets of Christianity which unveil the future world—the triumph and the “ rest ” of the righteous ; and in the text it seems to refer more specially to the confidence of the soul as to God’s intentions to render it eternally happy. The man who thus confides, believes that God is, not simply that he exists, but that he exists as a kind, compassionate, generous God, to the soul that seeks him. “ I have said unto the Lord, ‘ *Thou art my God.*’ ” Faith, here, is the reception of the divine testimony as to this future and eternal recompense, and as to the character of God as a loving, and most merciful, and most *munificent* Saviour—“ rich in goodness to all them that call upon him,” and “ found of all who diligently seek him.”

III. But it remains for us to notice THE INFLUENCE OF THIS FAITH UPON OUR HABITUALLY PLEASING GOD. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." No one can read the scriptures with attention, without being struck by the intense anxiety of God to produce and to perpetuate confidence in his mercy and grace. The great controversy lies in the struggle for the human heart. The world on the one hand claims its confidence, and God on the other. "Who art thou that fearest the oppressor, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose heart is stayed upon thee, because he trusted in thee." And when incarnate Deity tabernacled amidst the sons of men, it was always to honour confidence in his power and goodness. "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." * "O woman, great is thy faith." The whole of God's intercourse with man is to excite his gratitude and attachment; to prove to him that God's thoughts, in reference to generosity and compassion, are far higher than the thoughts of men; and to rectify the fatal mistake that happiness lies in external objects, and in the emoluments of earth. Amidst the din of worldly invitations, amidst the tumults of sensual excitement, a still small voice ceases not to ply its whispers, "Come unto me, and I will give thee rest." And wherever that

voice is heard and valued, there a sacred fellowship with heaven takes place, and produces progressive confidence in God. It hence appears to be of the last importance to our welfare, to entertain high and honourable thoughts of the generosity and munificence of God. It is worthy of Deity to produce the largest measure of expectation. He whose resources are unlimited, cannot fear the multiplicity of claims, or shrink before the widest hopes which his goodness has excited. And what an encouragement to godliness to be directed to trust, to confide, even to the uttermost of our wants and our wishes! On what vantage ground it might be thought does religion stand, when soliciting the attention of mankind! In earthly histories, the generous and liberal mind gathers round it a multitude of the wretched and the sad. Ah, why is that munificence which gave "the only-begotten Son to torture and to death" on man's behalf, the only munificence which fails to carry its high and effectual appeal to the human heart? "Oh that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!" Christianity is the exhibition of the divine character. Its chief feature is holy mercy. Hence faith is essential to our intercourse with God. He who *doubts* God's goodness, he who voluntarily severs himself from

God's care, and casts himself as an orphan upon his own resources, thus forces back the hand which is lifted up in his defence, and rejects the succours of omnipotence." "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Incredulity dishonours his truth and hardens the heart against all the allurements of his kindness. "God so loved the world that he gave his Son, that whosoever *believeth* on him should not perish." "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "Blessed," therefore, "are the people that *know the joyful sound*, they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." It is then the only mode of felicity "to believe that God is, and that he is the rewarder of all that diligently seek him."

It is sometimes, indeed, reckoned rash and presumptuous to speak or think strongly upon the *certainty* of redemption, upon the clear evidence of pardon and of grace. Is it then presumption to believe God's assurances? Is it rash to take God at his word, and to rest the full burden of our hopes upon his promises! Is it honourable to God to contract the limits of his grace, to cast a shade over the brightness of his offers, and to *conjecture the possibility* of mercy, when he declares the reality of atonement and of intercession? Oh, where is our faith in the loving-kindness of God? "He

that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not *with him freely give us all things.*" . We may blame as presumptuous, confidence in God, but God calls for it at our hands. His object is to rescue us from ruin, and to enrich us with an everlasting heritage. And he scruples not to *avow* his object; yea he forces it with a continual and gentle violence upon our notice. He bids us cast *all* our cares upon him, and surely he excludes not that heaviest of all *cares, anxiety* for pardon and redemption. Oh, there is nothing scanty and inadequate in the provisions of the gospel. Its resources are infinite, and its proclamation to the needy bears no equivocal character. Its voice is "believe and be happy. Come back to God, and God will welcome you to the full integrity of his joy. All shall be forgiven and forgotten. Credit his munificence, and abide beneath the covert of his wing." Shall these accents of entreaty be heard by us in vain? Shall we still cling to the deceptive assurances of the world, and rest upon the poor broken reeds of earth? Earthly blessings, moderately enjoyed and gratefully received, may embellish and smooth in part the rugged journey of life: but they cannot build up a final dwelling-place; they cannot occupy the place of God in the heart; they cannot fill up the deep void which sin has left in the human

soul. They can have no fellowship with all its inner necessities. They can carry no balm to the wounds of conscience; they can draw out no sting from death; they can achieve no victory over the grave! This is the work of God; this is the victory of Jesus Christ! Thrice happy those whom God has made willing to confide in his power. To them the storm of life shall pass harmless by. “ Their defence is the munition of rocks.” The outward walls may crumble to decay; but nought can touch “ their citadel of peace in Jesus’s blood.”

SERMON XIV.

THE REPROACH OF CHRIST.

HEBREWS xiii. 13, 14.

“LET US GO FORTH THEREFORE UNTO HIM WITHOUT THE CAMP, BEARING HIS REPROACH; FOR HERE HAVE WE NO CONTINUING CITY, BUT WE SEEK ONE TO COME.”

THESE words were addressed to Hebrew converts, who would enter more feelingly into their spirit and meaning than would the Gentile Christians. They refer to customs and circumstances with which the Hebrews were conversant, and they threw a bright radiance upon many obscure transactions which took place in the wilderness previous to the settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan. In the wilderness the Jews were wanderers, and the scene of their religious worship was not a settled temple but a moveable tabernacle. Into this tabernacle the high-priest of their religion annually entered, carrying with him the blood of a victim which had previously been slain, and burned without the camp. Now the apostle teaches

the Hebrew converts, that beneath these typical shadows were concealed certain great and substantial realities. His words are "The bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate." The animal slain under circumstances of contempt and destroyed without the sacred encampment of Israel, thus symbolised the contemptuous death which Jesus Christ would one day suffer without the gate of the holy city. The blood of the animal carried into the sanctuary by the high-priest, with which the mercy-seat was sprinkled, symbolised the precious blood of Christ, carried by himself as the great high priest over the house of God within the veil, to cleanse the mercy-seat of heaven, and to sanctify unto God those who should believe in his name. These, like the Israelites, are wanderers through the wilderness of this lower life, but they are treading a sure pathway to a better scene. They are seeking a higher and holier Zion than Israel ever inhabited. They anticipate an entrance into "that eternal city which hath indeed foundations whose builder and maker is God." Now the doctrine of salvation through the blood of Jesus, was intended to convey continually peace and healing

to the hearts of such. “It is good,” says the apostle, “that the heart be *established* with *grace*, and not with meats;” not, that is, with ceremonial institutions, which never profited those who rested in them.

The mere sacrifice of the tabernacle could never touch the heart or cleanse the conscience; but the grace or kindness of God exhibited in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which the death of the victim symbolised, is amply calculated to satisfy and to establish the heart. That which the ceremony was inadequate to perform, the mercy contained in the doctrine was equal to effect. It is the pure mercy of God evinced in the love which led him to give up to suffering and to death his only-begotten Son, “that whoso believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:” it is this mercy, this grace which establishes the trembling and agitated heart, and brings it into a near and peaceful relation with God. “We have therefore,” says the apostle, “an altar whereof they have no right or power to eat;” which still abide under the mere shadows and ceremonies of the outward tabernacle. We have an altar, the altar of eternal mercy, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, before which we repose with tranquillity and hope. We there feed upon the doctrines of an offered Saviour’s sacrifice, and “purged thereby from dead works,” we arise

nourished and refreshed “to serve the living God.”

The exhortation of the apostle which the text contains, is the proper result of the doctrine thus advanced, “Let us therefore go unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach: for here have we no abiding city, but we seek one to come.”

I. Let us briefly consider in these words, THE IMPORT OF THE APOSTLE'S EXPRESSION, “THE REPROACH OF CHRIST.”

II. HIS EXHORTATION TO GO FORTH TO HIM IN ORDER TO BEAR THAT REPROACH, and lastly,

III. THE MOTIVE BY WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS ENFORCED.

I. The term “reproach of Christ” had been used by the apostle in a preceding part of his epistle. He had spoken in relation to Moses, that gifted with true nobility of mind, “He had refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the *reproach* of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” Again, the apostle had said that Jesus Christ “the author and finisher of our faith,” had himself, for or instead of the joy which had been ever placed before him, in

high and ineffable intercourse with his Father, had voluntarily endured the cross, and thought light of, or despised the *shame*, that is, the *reproach* which attached to it." "The reproach" then to which the text refers, is the same reproach which Moses valued, and which Christ despised. What then is that reproach? It is connected evidently with the cross, on which Christ suffered, and which the apostle, lofty-minded as Moses in sentiment and in action, tells us he likewise rejoiced to contemplate; "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The death of the cross was the most ignominious death under which a criminal could suffer by the Roman law. Hence it was very natural to connect the idea of reproach with the cross, and in ordinary cases the connection was just. It was the punishment of crime. But there were peculiarities in the sufferings of Christ, which in reality invested them with splendour and dignity; for he died innocent of any crime, while the very malice of his foes could only record the notoriety of his beneficence, "He saved others, though himself he cannot save." The scriptures give a plain and satisfactory interpretation of these sufferings. They were, in fact, penal and expiatory of human guilt. The Son of God had become

incarnate, in order to endure them. God had a special design in permitting their infliction, and Christ had the same special design in supporting their weight. His sorrows evince in wondrous union, God's abhorrence of sin; the eternal connection between sin and misery; and the intense desire of God to rescue man from the grasp of this misery. The ignorance, pride, hardness, and stupidity of the Jewish nation were the medium by which these sufferings were accomplished; and little did their rulers imagine, that in the malediction which Christ underwent, the ultimate recovery of their nation, and the wide welfare of the world were in fact concerned. The reproach which belonged to the history of Christ, was therefore very unjust as to those who inflicted it, but most honourable as to him who endured it. But vice cannot comprehend virtue; and hence the reason why the character of Christ was traduced and defamed. His purity was intolerable to the polluted; hence calumny threw its base stains upon his name. He was derided, arraigned, scorned, crucified. His disciples wondered and wept at his fate. To human penetration it was indeed mysterious. With power to calm the sea and to raise the dead, he yielded himself an unresisting victim to national malice. Known to thousands whom his kindness had blessed, he died alone, pitied

but by the few tears of some in the humblest walks of life! From this object of national contempt and scorn, even his own disciples fled; and when at length he hung upon the cross, even his God abandoned his soul to the full horrors of his condition. Yes, the cry of abandonment was at length forced from his sacred lips, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!” Thought cannot reach the desolation of the Redeemer at that moment. “Reproach,” saith the prophetic psalmist, “hath broken my heart; I looked for some to have pity, and there was none; refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul.” But this dishonoured and mysterious sufferer ere long poured light upon his own history. The grave gave up the form which was destined never to see corruption. He came forth to vindicate his sacred character, and to reanimate and fortify the faith of his disciples. He came forth to declare, that the reproach which covered his name was the malignant calumny of men who refused conviction, though evidence bright as sunbeams gleamed upon the facts, whose import they denied. He came forth to assure the world, through the testimony of competent witnesses, that he had submitted to torture and to death, not on his own account, but on account of the sins of his people. He came forth in token of God’s approbation of that eternal work of mercy

which he had executed. He came forth that he might ascend beyond the clamour of his foes, and welcomed by anthems of celestial worshippers, he might become “an everlasting Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to his people and the remission of their sins.”

Scarcely had the astonished disciples time to testify their surprise and joy, when the influences of the Spirit and Comforter rested upon their minds, and removed every difficulty in the interpretation of the facts which they had witnessed. The whole subject of redemption was now revealed to their view. With holy boldness they proclaimed the resurrection of Christ to eternal glory, and his ascension to the right hand of power, as King of kings, and Lord of lords; even as “God over all blessed for ever.” The reproach of the “cross” had *now* in their minds passed away. Upon the darkness of that dishonour, heaven had shed its own lustre. It was *there* that justice and love had embraced each other; it was there that the weapons of destruction had been wrenched from Satan’s hands; it was *there* that the conquest over sin and death and hell had been achieved. It was there that the harmony and loveliness of God’s character had been displayed, and that the hopes of man had awakened from the dust! One single proclamation of these facts from an apostle’s lips, added three thousand witnesses

to the doctrine of the apostles, and the whole accordant band, gazing on the broken up tomb of their master, were ready to exclaim, “God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

Such was the *reproach* to which the apostle referred.

II. Let us next consider HIS INVITATION TO THE HEBREWS, TO PARTICIPATE AND TO BEAR THIS REPROACH. “Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, *bearing* his reproach.”

And here the first and direct suggestion of the apostle to the Hebrew Christians, doubtless, would be to unite themselves, closely and firmly, to this Redeemer—to put their whole confidence in his person and grace. It was with this feeling that the apostle Thomas, rescued by direct evidence from his culpable incredulity, had addressed him, “My Lord and my God!” He was now presented to the world, through the apostles of his religion, as the door of acceptance, the way of peace, the atonement for sin, the “Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world!” He was now “lifted up from the earth, that he might draw all men to him.” His name was revealed as the single name, “given under heaven, whereby men may be saved!” Closed was every other avenue to God! “By him alone

have we access, by one Spirit, unto the Father,"—"He is our peace,"—"The Lord our righteousness,"—"That out of his fulness we may receive grace for grace!"

Thus situated, the apostles besought their converts to seek out the friend who had, by an act of such costly generosity, purchased liberty and peace for their souls; to fasten their affections around a benefactor so worthy to call them forth; and to rest their entire dependence for reconciliation with God, upon the merits of his blood and righteousness! "We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!"

But the language of the apostle is yet more forcible. He intends to say, "Let us go to him, if need be, not simply as to a triumphant leader, but as to a yet suffering and dishonoured friend! Viewing the nature of that dishonour, and the interest which we have in its infliction, let us partake his burden, and bear his shame! He lies, as it were, without the camp. His name and his cause are blotted with infamy; and we have contributed to heap this shame upon his head! For us he toiled; for us he died; for us he reposed in the grave; and for us he lives again, the mediator, the

friend, and the God ! Let us go forth to him, animated by gratitude, by sympathy, by love !”

The apostle knew well, that the dishonour attached to the name of Christ had its sources, not entirely in the national mistakes which his countrymen had made as to the character of the Messiah. He looked deeper for these sources, and found them in the recesses of the human heart—in man’s repugnance to purity and to godliness. He knew, therefore, that disgrace would come back with Christ from the grave, and, more or less, would cling to his cause in every succeeding age ! He anticipated the contempt which a spiritual religion would ever incur in a world of iniquity and sense. “Marvel not if the world hate ^{ye} ~~sin~~ ; you know that it hated me before it hated you.” “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” The apostle contemplated, however, the intrinsic excellence of Christian truth, and the high character of its author. He felt persuaded, that to share the reproach of Christ with cordiality, was the greatest honour which could be conferred on a human being. It was to be identified with the cause of truth, of allegiance, and of righteousness ; it was to pursue the highest objects, and to love the worthiest name. “I am ready,”

exclaimed this apostle on another occasion, "I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." "Let us therefore go forth to him, without the camp, bearing his reproach." As if he had said, "If the world should still frown upon the fair interpretation of Christianity; if to unfold the depths of human guilt, and baseness, and misery, be still reckoned libellous upon man's dignity and condition; if to owe all of hope and of peace to the generous mediation of a crucified Saviour, be still esteemed galling to a pride which would carry its *claims* to the throne of God; if to cultivate purity of heart and conduct, under the sacred agency of the eternal Spirit, be decried as fanaticism and precision—then let us calmly meet the shame, and bare our bosoms to the scorn! It is our glory, our duty, and our joy! Let us meet it as he met it, not in anger, but in patience and in love; let us meet it as he met it, not in repining, but in compassion and in prayer"—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Such is the scope of the apostolic exhortation. It came warm from a grateful and healed heart; it glowed with a brother's charity; it remembered the worth of truth, and the lofty destiny of man; it was founded on the veracity of God, and on the prospects which he had opened to mankind.

III. For do we ask the MOTIVE BY WHICH IT WAS ENFORCED? Let us listen to the words of the apostle—"Here have we no abiding city, but we seek one to come;" as though he had said, "If this world were our final resting-place; if the sources of our enjoyment were found on earth, reproach and scorn would indeed be a dreary heritage." *If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable;* but we have here no abiding city—we are rather pilgrims and strangers. The judgment of man can affect us but little; we shall soon be placed beyond the reach of his contempt or of his applause. Our judgment is with the Lord, and our record is with God. At his tribunal we shall shortly stand. The estimate which men may form of our character, is a trifling consideration, when associated in our minds with the future allotments of God. Reproach loses all its bitterness, when the healed conscience can carry its appeal to the bosom of God. The din of an unkind strife is little heard amidst the calming whispers of that inward comforter, which tell us that the cause we have embraced, is the cause of truth and of charity. "For we have here no abiding city." The tent in which we lodge will soon be taken down. This is a wilderness, and our expectations must not be inconsistent. Paradise exists no longer. The flowers of earthly joy withered when sin shed its blight upon the scene. But from

the ruins of outward enjoyments, may yet arise a structure of security and happiness. Let us forego our hold of earth, and lean our thoughts on heaven. If we are wanderers through a wilderness, at least we know our path, and the place to which it leads. We are pilgrims, but with a definite aim—"We seek a city to come." Our affections have clung to objects which will not disappoint them. Yet a little while, "and our joy shall be full." Yet a little while, and the choice which we have made will warrant *reproach* no more. "It doth not yet indeed appear what we shall be; but we know that when our Lord and Master shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "When he shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory." In the prospect of *that* better world, we can smile at the *wreck* of *this*. We are contented to carry the reproach of man in the anticipation of the judgment of God. Oh how entirely will the clamours of earth be forgotten, when our ransomed souls shall hear the long recorded verdict, "*Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!*"

Such was the motive by which the apostle sustained his invitation to go forth without the camp, to bear the burden of his Lord. And have *we* not an equal interest with the Hebrew Christians, in the pursuit of this city to come? Sin hath cast its dark shadow over our earthly

prospect, as over theirs. The same spiritual disease—the same everlasting perdition wastes and threatens our happiness, as wasted and threatened theirs. Have we felt the solicitude of the apostle, as for our *own* healing, and for our *own* preservation? Have we fled to the same refuge, and taken shelter in the same atonement? Have we put on, by faith, the *robe of righteousness*, and clothed ourselves in the *garment of salvation*? Do we live under the strong impressions of the future; and do we estimate things around us by their connection *with eternity*? Are we affected by the sufferings of Christ, and influenced by them? Are we willing to share his reproach? and if it must be so, to be accounted fools by the world, for his name's sake? Can we enter into the lively sentiments of gratitude manifested by the saints of old? Can we declare, with humble yet firm confidence, “None of us liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether, therefore, living or dying we are the Lord's.” “For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge—that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.”

The answer which our hearts, and our habits of life, return to these questions, is full of interest to our eternal peace ! Oh that the testimony of conscience may be in our favour, and that these aspirations of the apostle may be all our own !

Then safety and repose are our heritage. Then a few fleeting years, and the struggles of earth shall be exchanged for the rest and felicity of heaven !

SERMON XV.

RELIGION ATTACKED UNDER NAMES OF REPROACH.

Acts xi. 26.

“AND THE DISCIPLES WERE FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS AT ANTIOCH.”

SEVERAL respectable commentators upon the New Testament history, have thought that the name, “Christians” was given to the disciples by God himself, as declarative of their high and holy relation to their Saviour, Jesus Christ. The arguments in favour of this opinion, may perhaps appear to be inconclusive, and the probability to be far greater, that the term was originally applied by the enemies of Christianity, in order to cast ridicule upon its adherents.

The people of Antioch, among whom this name was first used, were remarkable for their satirical disposition; and it is striking to observe, that the appellation never afterwards occurs, but in connection with the idea of reproach. The word occurs twice in the remaining part of the New Testament. It occurs

once, when the apostle Paul, defending, in chains, the cause of his blessed master, before king Agrippa, forced from that monarch the well-known exclamation, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." It occurs again in the second Epistle of St. Peter, when the apostle would cheer the disciples under their difficulties and persecutions. "If any man suffer as a Christian," he says, "let him not be ashamed." On both these occasions, the expression seems to stand in connection with contempt and suffering. On the first, Agrippa sees before him a prisoner bound in chains, in defence of his proscribed religion, and under the influence of the heroic charity which this prisoner evinced, the king is, for a moment, ready to share his infamy, that he might partake his hopes. On the other occasion, the apostle Peter appears anxious to uphold the converts under the peculiar perils of their condition; and aware of the scorn to which they were exposed on account of their religion, he besought them not to shrink, nor to be ashamed, if they suffered as Christians. The term thus stands in connection with suffering, and in no other. It is scarcely conceivable, that it should not have frequently occurred, had the appellation been of divine authority. The probability, therefore, appears to be great, that the disciples of Jesus Christ received the name,

“Christians,” at Antioch, as a term of scorn and reproach. The name correctly, indeed, marked out their high relation to their heavenly master, but it was used with malignant intention. It was a name which soon became endeared to those who received it, but it was affixed to their persons with any other than a friendly motive.

The circumstance thus recorded, may furnish an opportunity for some remarks UPON THE DISPOSITION OF MANKIND TO DECRY THE VALUE OF TRUE RELIGION, BY REPRESENTING IT UNDER TERMS OF RIDICULE AND REPROACH.

The word of God, has in a very decided manner, unveiled the secret motives by which men are actuated. It is a revelation from him who knows what is in man; who penetrates into the recesses of his heart; who is familiar with his moral history, and with his prevalent propensities. This revelation tells us of our fall from innocence, of the loss of our allegiance to God, and of the consequent depravity of mind by which we are continually led astray.

The state of the world is described as “without God;” as “holding the truth in unrighteousness;” as “lying in wickedness,” so that he that would become the friend of the world, must become the enemy of God. If these statements be the accredited record of

God, it will follow, that true religion, which is **nothing** else than the love and service of **God**, must be repugnant to the bent and scope of human desires and actions. It ought not therefore to appear wonderful, if true religion be opposed and decried in the world; nevertheless, it is not a frequent occurrence to find religion, *as such*, freely, openly, and deliberately condemned. “The fool hath sometimes indeed said in his heart, there is no God;” but, generally speaking, there is a willing admission of the existence and sovereignty of God; and few are found anxious to withdraw from the cheering notion of an arm of strength, which, under the sad vicissitudes of life, may be lifted up in their defence and support. We possess a consciousness of our inherent weakness; of necessary dependence for safety upon causes placed beyond the reach of our controul; a consciousness of violating the decisions of conscience, the accomplishment of which was our duty, and would have been our honour. We feel, at times, a certain awe of God, as the sovereign and the judge of our actions. The idea of our moral responsibility is sometimes even painfully obtrusive. Hence, religion is natural to man. He cannot subsist altogether without some sort of connection with God. In the utter frivolity of youth, perhaps, he may for a

moment seem self-sufficient. But as he advances into life; as he becomes encircled by the various instincts and charities of society; as he is forced to grapple with the sorrows and disappointments which confront him in his course to the grave, he feels the importance of some interior force and consolation, beyond the reach of his own apparent resources. He believes this force to exist in religion. He will not therefore oppose the general notion of religion. The worship of God will command a certain portion of respect, and the ordinances of religion will be hallowed as far as convenience and respectability may suggest. But it is evident, that the coarser necessities and fears of his heart have thus compelled him to be religious. He flies to religion, to make good his own deficiencies. He has no cheering knowledge of God, as of a holy, glorious, and benevolent being, in whose service is honour, life, and peace. His *affections* cling to the world, and he would not be religious if he could find a readier pathway to security. His *propensities* are towards the *creature* rather than the *Creator*. He has no penetrating conviction of depravity and guilt, which would endear to him the liberal mercies and the grace of God. He has no adequate notion of the nature of that inward defilement which would lead him to value any method which God might suggest,

in which such defilement might be removed. He will pause in his religious history, at the point where he must resign his prevalent habits and opinions. The moment religion assumes a holy, internal, and spiritual aspect, he will shrink from its exhibition. The general and vague notion of mercy and of power on the part of God, is refreshing to him; but when that mercy and that power appear in close alliance with purity, and love, and active service, and fervent gratitude, then he manifests his repugnance, and declares his habitual feelings and affections to be wounded and chilled by such requirements.

May we not here discover the reasons which led to the conduct mentioned in the text, and to its frequent imitation in the religious history of the world?

The misgivings of the heart; the secret testimonies and whisperings of conscience; the sensations of frailty; the perspective of pain and suffering and death, force from us the bending of the knee, the homage of an external devotion. Hence, the temples of paganism, and the churches of Christianity, alike receive the occasional visits of mankind. The world is religious in this imperfect and cheap manner. But the heart is corrupt, the taste is depraved, the habits are sensual, the propensities are earthborn. Thence, the requirements of reli-

gion, when exhibited as an internal principle of love and devotedness, are displeasing and repulsive.

The love of God ; the service of God ; the honour, the glory of God ; the actual intercourse of the soul with God, as a paternal, gracious, and holy being, is in complete repugnance to all the existing emotions, tastes, and pleasures of society. Therefore such a religion must be opposed and decried. But how shall this be done ? It is too palpable a thing to say that we ought *not* to love God ; that we ought *not* to serve him sincerely ; that we ought *not* to devote ourselves to our highest benefactor and our mightiest friend ; that we ought *not* to render to him the homage of the heart, but that rather we ought to be satisfied with a mere dead form and ceremony of religion ; and that we only require divine aid when calamity and death actually invade our peace, or darken our prospects. Such language were too palpable an insult to the rights of God ; but the *practice harmonizing* with such language, must of necessity be adopted, or the din and pleasure of life cannot maintain their ascendancy. To what delusion then must we have recourse in this perplexity ? How shall we retain our earthliness, and yet not cast off our religion ? The difficulty has been met in this way. We affix a reproachful term to true religion, and then

we proceed to decry it under the shelter of that term. We dare not manfully and fairly avow a practical resistance to God's will, but we more cowardly exaggerate or caricature that will, and then we ridicule it; and thus save ourselves from the severe reproaches of that inward monitor, from whose awful upbraiding we could not otherwise escape. We seem now rather to oppose error and folly, than religion. It is not now religion which we condemn, but its abuse. We oppose not God nor his truth, but the superstitious delusions of erring beings like ourselves. We thus invent or seize some expressive word already in existence, which holds up a distorted view of some doctrine of truth and of righteousness; we give it currency in the world, and then go on our way in the quietness of self-esteem; adhering still to the general theory of religion, but escaping its inward, and spiritual, and honourable yoke.

When our blessed Saviour himself was in the world, he met exactly this treatment at its hands. His religion was too pure and too spiritual for the world's endurance; but to combat this religion as such was too fearful a task. Hence, ridicule became the mode of attack. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Have the rulers believed on him?" "But this people which know not the law are cursed." After his death, Christianity shared the same

fate. Calumny and slander invented allegations under which to hold it up to contempt, and oftentimes but too entirely succeeded in their attempts. They have derived likewise an assistance in those efforts, which might well have been spared. Christians themselves, actuated in the main by high and generous motives, have nevertheless exhibited, in every age, more or less, the spirit of party. "I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas." They have been too much disposed to adopt the peculiar sentiments of those who have been their teachers, and who have perhaps felt strongly, and reasoned dogmatically, on those points over which God seems to have thrown the veil of obscurity; an obscurity, intended to excite our humility, and to exercise our charity. The spirit of partisanship has thus, to a certain degree, given a bias and peculiarity to their sentiments, and they have turned from the simplicity of the scriptures, to attach undue weight to the decisions of mere human interpretation. The use which the world could make of this spirit of party was but too obvious. Those who found in themselves no alliance of heart with the spiritual doctrines of the gospel, were glad to fix upon the peculiarities of these teachers, to exaggerate their peculiarities, and to *detach* them from their *connection with other opinions*, which *practically*, perhaps, *no*

dified or *mitigated* the evils which might be supposed to flow from them. Forgetful, at the same time, of the exhibition of genuine Christianity, which the main points of their doctrine and practice afforded, they held up these notions, thus distorted, as the *whole* of their religion; and thus proceeded to vilify true godliness, under an unfair and partial statement of the views of those who were prominent in its defence. It is to be feared, in modern times, that the terms Methodist and Calvinist, or Evangelical, are used by multitudes precisely in this way. There may be some who honestly, though ignorantly, affix these names to others, while really they love the humbling and soul-transforming doctrines of the gospel, and are in nearly full accordance with the main views of those whom, through ignorance and misconception, they thus decry. But it would be weakness, and not charity, to attempt to shield numbers from the charge of thus unkindly and wilfully misrepresenting the sentiments of many persons more anxious than themselves upon the subject of religion. It is not simply the peculiar or distorted notion of the sect which they, in fact, wish to condemn. It is the undeniable claims of holiness, and of the duties connected with those claims, which they in fact oppose.

Let, for instance, a Calvinist cease to be a

Calvinist. Let him disclaim any feeling of sympathy with the peculiar notions of Calvin. Let him become as to these notions perfectly opposed to that eminent reformer ; but let him at the same time hold fast the good and glorious doctrines of the Saviour of the world ; let him love and labour after the heavenly character to which these doctrines lead ; let him offer to God a spiritual sacrifice ; let him call that evil which God calls evil, and that good which God calls good ; let him seek in sober earnestness the salvation of his soul, through a heartfelt faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ ; let him “ set his affections on things above, and not on things on the earth ; ” let him oppose the current maxims and unholy practices of a thoughtless world ; let him do this however meekly and humbly as to his own pretensions, as to his estimate of his own character before God, let him thus act, and his dereliction of the peculiarities of Calvin will have gained him nothing in the judgment of his accusers. They in fact dislike his efforts after holiness far more than any speculative tenet which Calvin may have held. This is, it may be feared, the real state of the matter, and it is elucidated by the solemn and emphatic declarations of Christ, “ How can ye believe, who seek honour one of another, and not that honour which cometh from God only.” “ Marvel not, if the world

hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The injustice of this line of conduct, it is, however, not difficult to discern.

Let religion be judged by a reference to the sacred scriptures, and not by a reference to human authority. Religion, the religion of a fallen man, is alone to be found in that depository of truth; and let its claims be admitted or refused according to their accordance or disagreement with that full and infallible standard. But let not the errors or follies of those who are its professed disciples be identified with those grand, healing, and efficacious truths which will remain the lights and beacons of a benighted world, when those who oppose, or those who distort them shall have passed away for ever!

Such an identification of the views of a particular person with the holy demands of the religion of Jesus Christ, appears to be one of the most effectual engines which Satan employs to thwart, and, if possible, to ruin the cause of truth in the world. The process is cowardly and disingenuous. A man is seriously perhaps pursuing the salvation of his soul. He feels the interests of eternity pressing

upon his heart. He holds in his hands the volume which God has given to illuminate his path, and to point his course to the heavenly world. He desires to take this word of truth as his standard of right and wrong. He desires to correct by its assistance the false notions and pernicious maxims by which he in common with millions, has been led astray. He believes the fact that Jesus Christ died for sinners, and he feels the recoil of a warm and generous gratitude. He would trust, love, and serve that Saviour. He would pursue his footsteps through this dangerous world, and he would quit the track of others when they quit the path by which his Saviour walked. Is he on this account compelled to be singular? Is he compelled to withdraw from scenes, from amusements, from enjoyments which the genius of Christianity, if not the direct words of inspiration, condemns? Is he compelled to guard against the immoral influences which have pressed upon him, and do press upon him from ten thousand quarters? What is the fair, manly, and honourable judgment which his fellow-creatures ought to pass upon such a man? If they would condemn him let them do it distinctly and openly, upon a reference to the Christian scriptures. Let their condemnation harmonize with that standard. But if that standard would turn back their condemnation

upon themselves; if that standard would, in the main, uphold the views of the individual whom they scrutinize; if that standard would teach *themselves*, that religion is a holy, spiritual, and affectionate dedication of the heart and life to God; in this case, let them hush the voice of slander; let them confess that the levity and frivolity of a worldly life may rather offer a mournful presumption that *their* conduct would ill bear the keen inspection of him who penetrates the heart! To act otherwise, to close deliberately the pages of revelation, to search out some term of reproach by which to decry a religion which they dare not openly attack, to avail themselves of the *errors of doctrine* or *of the infirmities of practice* which they discover in its more ardent adherents, in order to depress the whole standard of godliness; this is a conduct which is in the highest degree unfair, unjust, and unworthy the dictates of a high and honourable mind.

How few, it is to be feared, comprehend that which they intend to express, when they affix the term Methodist or Calvinist to the character of another? Ask for a clear definition of the term, and they would seek in vain to render one! Let such investigate the motives by which they are actuated. Let them pass a candid judgment upon their feelings, and they would perhaps find that the real

matter of dislike and of reproach, is the sober seriousness of piety; the claims of a religion which forms cannot satisfy, nor earthliness delight; a religion which demands humility and submission, the offerings of a broken heart, and the gratitude of a glowing and anxious spirit.

Oh, let not terms beguile us; let not epithets ignorantly used destroy our souls. Many are led away from the solemn and awful contemplation of eternal realities by the dread of a name and by the unjust ridicule of others. But how cruel is this sarcasm and this levity, to the happiness of our fellow-creatures! Shall we injure thus deeply the moral being of another! Shall we turn him back from the path of life which he is labouring to reach, shall we force from his yet feeble grasp the rising hopes of his soul, by telling him that his anxiety is misplaced, and that his character is about to be wrecked amidst the delusions of methodism and of folly? Alas, what will such a remark effect, if it effect any thing, but to rob a forlorn yet immortal spirit of its intercourse with God, and of its peace throughout eternity!

Oh let us beware, as a learned prelate of our church, Bishop Horsley, has observed, "lest in decrying Calvinism, and we may apply the same remark to methodism, or to any other term, we vilify and injure the vital and substantial doctrines of the gospel." Let us know

well what it is that we do oppose. Let us not hold up to contempt, under the disguise of a name, the feelings which can alone link us to our God, and shelter our souls from perdition.

In offering with humility and diffidence these few remarks, we give no opinion upon those points which have been a source of long and mournful contention even to the good and sincere. We only ask for mutual candour, consideration, and humility. We ask for a manly avowal of truth, and a manly examination of falsehood. We ask for an ingenuous and liberal construction of the conduct of those who may differ from ourselves. We ask, above all, for an unequivocal reference to those scriptures to whose decisions an ultimate appeal will one day be made.

A few fleeting years, and the whole truth will meet our view. A few fleeting years, and wealth becomes vain, rank a sound, pleasure insipid, ungodliness perdition. A few fleeting years, and we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to hear his everlasting decision on our character and on our destiny. Oh how unimportant then by what name we have been called, what leader we have followed, or what leader we have been beguiled not to follow!

The great, the absorbing, the only interest in that solemn moment will be our relation to the Son of God. Are we his followers, his

servants, his friends? Have we forgiveness through his blood, “even the remission of sins.” Have we fellowship with his Spirit, conformity with his views? Are we rescued from the thralldom of the world? Are we prepared for the mansions of purity? Oh let us limit our anxieties to these questions, and in that tremendous hour all will be safe for ever. “

SERMON XVI.

A PERCEPTION OF CHRIST'S LOVE THE EFFECTUAL SOURCE OF OBEDIENCE.

2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

“FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH US, BECAUSE WE THUS JUDGE, THAT IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN WERE ALL DEAD, AND THAT HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THEY WHICH LIVE SHOULD NOT HENCEFORTH LIVE UNTO THEMSELVES, BUT UNTO HIM WHICH DIED FOR THEM, AND ROSE AGAIN.”

THE doctrines which the apostles taught, and the labours which they underwent in their promulgation were sometimes supposed to be the result of fanaticism, and even of madness. “Much learning doth make thee mad,” said Festus to St. Paul. Sometimes however the truths which they declared made the deepest impressions upon the hearts of their hearers. “And when Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.” But whatever opinion men entertained of their character, their doctrine, or their labours, the apostles went nobly onwards in their

glorious work. The salvation of immortal souls was the object which Jesus Christ had placed before them, and to realise this object, they gladly gave their whole energy and strength, although aware that their doctrine would be “to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness.” Animated by the love and the example of their dying master, they were enabled, in the face of every obstacle, to declare “whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; for the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again.”

These words point out,

I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO BE THE EFFECTUAL SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE.

II. And THE UNLIMITED EXTENT TO WHICH THE PERCEPTION OF THIS LOVE WILL OPERATE.

I. In order to evince the value of the LOVE OF CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE, let us contrast this motive to moral virtue, with many other motives by which the majority of mankind are influenced. Among these, it may be sufficient to select the following, *habit, the desire of reputation, the fear of*

future punishment, and a general reverence for the Creator. All these, more or less, operate in human society as motives to religion, and all are very deficient. Perhaps the most **general** inducement to religious and moral duty is *habit*. Religion is found to have a kindly influence upon human society: some of its precepts are absolutely essential to the very existence of social order. Hence few men are to be found who wish to reject altogether from their own minds, or to drive away from the minds of others the admonitions of moral obligation. Up to a certain point, the claims of religion are generally allowed. There is therefore in the world a habit of religion. The son follows the steps of the father. The first, for instance, goes to church, because the latter has set him the example. He sometimes offers up a prayer, because the practice commenced with infancy. He involuntarily condemns some actions and praises others, because the praise of the one class of actions, and the condemnation of the other is familiar to his observation. On the sabbath-day he will likewise occasionally read the scriptures, not because he has any particular desire to understand them, but because he has been taught in early life to read them. In all his moral duties, he is directed by habit and example. There is little of serious reflection in his conduct. He falls easily into the

track or mould of custom. This is perhaps the religious condition of a large number in every congregation. There is no kind of anxiety as to their feelings towards God. It is almost indifferent to them, as far as religious anxiety is concerned, whether the duties to which we have referred are performed or not. They are ready to omit them for any fair excuse. It is obvious to remark, that *habit* is however a very defective principle of religion. It has nothing to awaken devotion, nothing to stimulate to real obedience, nothing calculated to please God. It induces a religion of *form* rather than of *influence*, a religion of the *body* rather than of the soul.

2. Scarcely superior to this principle is *the desire of reputation*. It results from the preceding remarks, that a certain kind of religion is favourable to reputation. It is no praise to a man, that he professes a contempt for religion. Other qualities may render him respected and beloved, but he would be yet more respected if he added to these an apparent regard to the decent duties of piety. Even in the eye of the world, a father of a family never looks so venerable as when surrounded by his children in the house of God, or when instructing them in the duties of integrity and benevolence. Now the observation of this result from piety in others is often an inducement to a man to cul-

tivate religion in himself. He sees its value in life. He wishes for the approbation of his fellow-creatures. He desires that his friends should repose upon his justice, his honour, his truth. He values the names of a good citizen, an upright neighbour, a kind husband, an indulgent father, a generous friend. The decorum of religion is more or less needful to insure this character to him. Therefore he esteems religion. He accounts it honourable to appear in the sanctuary of God, to educate his family in the paths of virtue, to discountenance open profligacy, and to uphold the interests of morality. It is not to be supposed that any man acts *altogether* from this motive, but it is certainly the predominant principle by which many are governed. To pass through life with honour and respect, is certainly the supreme object with many. Now the reflection of a moment might evince this principle to be not merely defective but hostile to religion. Its very aim is the gratification of pride and self-esteem. It tends to exalt *man*, not *God*. It forgets the very first feeling of all religion, "God be merciful to me a sinner." To those who act upon this principle, the question of our Lord may fairly be put, "How can ye believe, who seek honour one of another, and seek not that honour which cometh from God only."

3. Let us examine the next motive to re-

ligion, *the fear of punishment*. There is a natural alarm respecting eternity in the human mind. The thought of a future world is solemn and affecting. No one has come back from the grave to instruct us in the secrets of the world above. We are ignorant of the reception which those have met from God, who have preceded us in the last struggles of death. We are conscious of many offences; we have acted against our knowledge of duty; against the dictates of conscience, against the resolutions which we have repeatedly formed. A day of retribution, the punishment of the guilty, attaches to our notions of God's moral government of the world. Reflection thus produces alarm. Can we live altogether at ease when the notices of eternity break forth, however confusedly upon our view? Should we meet at any time the chilling spectacle of a funeral, it would be strange if the thought intruded not, "Where is the soul?" Anxiously sometimes does the mind follow in thought the kindred companion of the past, and wonder to what scene it has fled, when the form by which it was tenanted lies at rest amidst the cold shadows of the grave! The recurrence of such thoughts produces a species of religion. It stimulates men to do something for God and for their own souls. It produces a fear of wrath which forces them on the duties and on the

outworks of piety. Behind these duties they seek a refuge from the clamours of conscience. These duties they lay up as a foundation for hope, when about to quit for ever the din and occupations of life. But this fear of the future is a very inadequate motive to religion. Suppose it to exist to *a high degree*, and it degenerates into views entirely subversive of all the gracious invitations of the gospel. Suppose it to be *weak and momentary*, and it can effect little that is medicinal to the heart. In melancholy moments, in hours of sickness, in scenes of calamity, it will produce remorse and misery, but with the departure of these moments, it will lose all its influence. There is, then, nothing left to perpetuate religion; nothing to induce to devotion, when the misgivings of the heart are checked and quieted.

4. Similar to this principle as to its efficiency is the mere and indistinct *desire for future happiness*. With some minds there is a freer and more generous feeling connected with futurity. They occasionally contemplate a *world* of which the calamities of *this* form no feature. They draw a pleasing picture of the immortality to which the unburdened soul will be admitted at death. They anticipate the enlargement of our faculties, the extent of our knowledge, the unchangeableness of our acquired felicity. They view God entirely through the medium of his

mercy, and never through that of his *justice*. They engage in the occasional duties of religion, under the pleasing expectation that these duties will ultimately insure them a place in the mansions of the blessed. But this indistinct idea of future happiness will be found to operate very feebly and partially in urging to a religious life. It will give way before every temptation in which present pleasure can be strongly enjoyed. It will cease to influence whenever self-interest or appetite shall solicit in any violent degree. The pleasure of the life that *is*, will ever be far more attractive than the dim visions of a joy *yet to be*.

5. It remains to refer to one other motive to religion, *a partial reverence for the Creator*. Veneration for the Creator, is a principle which acts more or less upon every reflecting mind, which has not yet landed upon the outcast shores of atheism. The supreme ruler of the universe is an obscure object to them of awe and majesty. They desire to bow before his power, and to keep silence before the decisions of his providence. But that providence, distinct from the promises of revelation, is too *general* to be *attractive*. It has little controul over the habits of the mind, or over the sources of daily happiness. Let experience testify its feebleness and inconsistency as a principle of moral action. How frequently do the same

lips which appeared to adore the name of God in the public sanctuary, wantonly desecrate it in private life ! use it upon the slightest occasion of surprise, anger, or mirth ! How frequently does the man who acknowledges the law of conscience as the deputy of God within the soul, reject all its decisions in the pursuit of criminal enjoyment ! A general notion of God, formed without a reference to Christianity, appears to be altogether without influence upon mankind !

6. Let us now contrast with these low and inadequate motives to religion, the motive contained in the text. “ For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.” A *perception of the love of Christ* to his soul, was the motive which here induced the apostle to lead a religious life ; which even constrained him, in the prosecution of that life, to undergo the severest labours, and to meet the keenest sufferings. Now, to evince more clearly the efficacy of *gratitude* as a principle of religion, let us advert, for a moment, to its recognized influence in the details of social life. Trace then the operation of this principle in a child. He recollects the love which induced the

parent to toil for the support, the education, the comfort, the happiness of his children. He recalls to his mind a love which consented to give the whole strength of manhood in labours for their welfare; a love which often trembled at the beginning of their active career, anxious to mark the course which they would take of virtue or of vice; a love which diminished not its energies through the toils of many years, and which still lifted up his children to his view as the last solicitous subject of thought, when perhaps he supposed himself to lie stretched upon the bed of death! Or imagine the child to recall the yet more tender emotions of *maternal* affection; to retrace the patience, glowing, beautiful, and unwearied, with which she watched and cherished her infant, through the long period of its helplessness; the very number and variety of its wants but stimulating the more strongly the exertions of her maternal care; urged by affection, labour even became pleasure, and wakefulness delight! Now what are the subsequent *influences of gratitude* in a child, thus reverting with interest to the history of the past? What are the feelings with which he recurs to these early and by-gone days? Are there any sensations more sacred or more productive, than those which dilate the bosom beneath recollections like these? Under such kindling emotions, how often has the child

sacrificed health and selfish prosperity, in order to lead down a parent's grey hairs with peace to the grave! To gratitude, as to original love, toil is light, and sacrifice small. With what touching fidelity have even *servants* sometimes soothed the adversity of their masters, and yielded a succour, warm, honest, and unbought, when expected friends have failed!

Now let us apply these remarks to religion. The apostle declares, "the love of Christ constraineth us;" and what is the nature of this love? "*We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.*" Here are two particulars, *human misery* and the *death of Christ* to rescue us from that misery. The expression, "*then were all dead,*" is but too justly declarative of human wretchedness. It implies our condition of moral depravity; our exposure, sooner or later, to the corruption of the grave, and to the ultimate judgment of God. This was the human condition, in the estimate of the apostle. He felt it to be his own. Hence, while he emphatically declared, "that *all* have sinned;" from his more minute knowledge of his *own* heart, he added, respecting these sinners, "of whom *I* am chief." The other expression, "*if one died for all,*" refers to the death of Christ, the Son of God, as offered up in our nature, a victim to infinite justice; being "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised

for our iniquities.” “He tasted of death for every man;” “that whoso believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It was thus at the cross, that the mind of the apostle came into fullest contact with the love of Christ. He deeply felt his own miserable and guilty state; and with these strong sensations pressing upon his heart, he surveyed the high and generous efforts which Christ had made in his behalf. He contrasted the bondage of sin with the liberty wherewith Christ had set him free. He contrasted the remorse of a troubled mind, with the calm repose of a heart “cleansed by the blood of the everlasting atonement.” He contrasted the unmitigated pangs of perpetual sorrow, with the growing joys of eternal bliss. He recollected the dignity of the person through whose agency this mysterious change had been wrought in his moral condition; and he brought into contrast with this dignity, his own utter meanness. What was the result? Penetrated with shame, while melted into gratitude, he could only exclaim, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? But for thee, I had been ruined far beyond the hope of recovery. I owe thee all. I want language to express my obligations. I am constrained to live no longer unto myself, but unto thee!”

Such was the love of Christ alluded to in the

text, which compelled the apostle and his fellow-labourers to all their arduous exertions in his service. Oh how poor, cold, and feeble does every other motive to religion appear by the side of this ! Is filial affection ; is gratitude to a generous benefactor ; is the tenderness of fondest friendship ; are all these motives powerful to constrain to duty, and to urge to service ? See all these motives more than united here ! What recoil of holiest love ; what glowing sensations of gratitude, can be excited equal to those which the perception of the love of Christ is calculated to awaken in a contrite and enlightened heart ? Yes ! “ we love him because he first loved us.” “ *None of us liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself ; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether therefore living or dying, we are the Lord's : for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.*”

II. But we have yet very briefly to notice, THE ACTUAL EXTENT TO WHICH THE PERCEPTION OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL WILL OPERATE. It may be here recalled to mind, that the devotion which arises from every other principle is occasional and limited. It is insufficient to bring us through temptation. It is insufficient to warm and to animate the

affections and sympathies of our nature. It is insufficient to produce any cordial and active disposition to piety. Such a devotion is not, in fact, of divine origin ; it is not the effect of divine grace in the heart. It is rather the cold, formal, and stinted calculation of a worldly and earth-born policy. On the contrary, that love to Christ, which is founded on the recollection, alike of his intrinsic excellence, as of his transcendant kindness to man, is stated in Scripture to be the result of a holy and divine influence upon the soul. This love finds its hallowed access to the deepest recesses of the heart. Like the beams of day, it pervades, and warms, and fructifies every inner *region*, every nobler faculty of the mind. It excites to a religious practice, *unlimited* and *progressive*. It renovates the whole character. It gives a new colour and complexion to all the events and interests of time, by bringing them into a close and incessant comparison with those of eternity. It affords a new estimate of all present objects, while it directs the best affections of the soul into the best and safest channels. It results in this sacred and never to be forgotten determination, “ *We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.*”

Looking up to **Christ**, with all the consecrated feelings of adoring gratitude, with an overwhelming sense of the value of his salvation, a Christian will now recoil from the thought of scantily measuring out his services, or of coldly calculating the lowest scale on which it may be supposed decent and safe to deal forth his homage to the Almighty. He now acts upon this high and generous principle, "I will no longer live to myself, but to Jesus Christ. I will dedicate to his service the highest faculties, and the warmest sensations of which I am possessed. I am no longer my own, but bought with a price, that I should glorify God with my body and spirit, which are his. To do his will, shall be my supreme desire, my constant purpose, my active pursuit. While my hands may be occupied in the fulfilment of my social duties in the world, my heart shall be devoted to Christ alone. His commands shall be my rule, his atonement my shelter, his love my refuge, his approbation my high and everlasting reward." "*Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth which I desire beside thee. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me with glory.*"

3/ Dec 1826

SERMON XVII.

CHRISTIAN SELF-DENIAL.

MATTHEW xvii. 24—27.

“THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME. FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT, AND WHOSOEVER WILL LOSE HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE SHALL FIND IT. FOR WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED IF HE SHALL GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL? OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL? FOR THE SON OF MAN SHALL COME IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER, WITH HIS ANGELS, AND THEN SHALL HE REWARD EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS.”

THE commencement of religion in the soul, is a conviction of its importance. Until we become serious upon the subject, we effect little. We may speculate; we may take up opinions, or we may lay them down; we may pronounce dogmatically upon truth and falsehood; we may love or we may abhor to make proselytes; but we are little advanced in this manner on our way to God. The absence of seriousness is the absence of all good. Yet what a rare quality is seriousness in religion! Where is

the man who feels as he ought his relation to God, and his nearness to eternity? Where is the man who weighs time and eternity in just scales? Where is the man who trembles before God as a sinner; and who seeks out, in the sober energy of sincerity, the salvation of his soul? Certainly there are such persons, but they are very rare; and when discovered, their solicitude often excites a smile, if not contempt, in the breasts of those around them. This is very strange and very affecting.

The prevalent habit of society, is levity and indifference upon the subject of religion. It may be conceded, very generally, that men pay a certain decent attention to the forms of religion; that Christianity is apparently supported; and that direct levity upon the subject is painful to many; but *real practical* levity is widely prevalent. Men are not in earnest to know and to do the will of God. The great facts of Christianity are not written upon the heart, are not influential upon the affections. We understand anxiety upon temporal interests, but not upon eternal interests. It is allowed to a man to feel intensely upon the subject of politics, science, and domestic events. The anticipation of temporal evil is allowed to call forth vigilance, effort, industry; but a man is suspected as to the soundness of his judgment, and as to the excellence of his motives, if this

anxiety should be directed to *eternal* interests. If a man should fear that *these* interests may be in a state of peril, and should betray any evident solicitude of heart, as to the result, he is immediately supposed to have a tendency to fanaticism, and his friends dread the progress of such a tendency in his mind. There is certainly a great difference as to the *degree* of alarm and reluctance which the perception of religious anxiety produces ; but religious anxiety is certainly an object of great suspicion to the generality of mankind. They love to suppose that all is right ; and their apprehension is great, lest the customs of society should be invaded, and the demands of pleasures and profit be endangered. But how directly opposed is this apprehension to the claims and to the value of Christianity !

In the book of God, where can levity or indifference find their excuse or their shelter ? “ The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom ; ” and “ to depart from evil, that is understanding.” What a heart-appalling seriousness ever rested upon the lips of Jesus Christ ? Who can read the passage of scripture before us, without feeling that it makes an entire appeal to all the hopes and fears of the soul ? It claims an unreserved surrender of the whole life to God. “ *Whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake ;*

shall find it." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This declaration of Christ comprises,

I. A DEMAND UPON HIS FOLLOWERS FOR THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF SELF-DENIAL.

II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH IT RESTS THAT DEMAND.

I. These two points let us briefly examine. First, JESUS CHRIST MAKES A DEMAND UPON HIS FOLLOWERS FOR THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF SELF-DENIAL.

The qualities essential to a true disciple of Christ, are a readiness to "take up the cross," and a willingness even to lose life itself in his cause. The expressions of our Saviour on other occasions, are even stronger than those in the text. Thus, "he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of it." "And he that taketh not his cross and followeth not after me, is not worthy of it." And again, "There went great multitudes with him, and he turned and said to them, If any man come to me, and hate not father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." "For which of

you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it, lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, ‘this man began to build and was not able to finish.’” “So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

The plain and obvious import of all these expressions, requires every disciple to stand prepared for the greatest privations; even to the loss of natural protectors, or of the most endeared connections, or of life itself. The words certainly do not imply, that Jesus Christ will in *every case call* for these sacrifices; that the result of true religion in the heart will always be the tearing away the tenderest objects from the soul. The history of God’s providence is of a very different kind; but they certainly do imply, that no man can be a genuine servant of Christ, who is not *willing*, should Christ make the demand, to forsake all that he hath; even all that had been linked the firmest and the closest to his heart; all that in other days of self-ignorance may have constituted the entire fabric of his happiness. All this he must be prepared to resign, if he cannot retain it with loyalty and fidelity to his Saviour. Hence, no man is a real Christian,

who is not in that state of mind which would *lead him* to part with any object, should God teach him that the retention of that object is incompatible with duty. In this case, he must act even as though he “hated” it. He must cast it from him. He must “cut it off,” though it has been dear to him “as his right hand.”

In the early ages of Christianity, the disciples of Christ were frequently called upon to meet this trial, even in the highest stages of its severity. They were torn from wives and children. They were given to the sword, and to beasts of prey. They died amidst the execrations of mankind. Their religion was at once an unbending principle of the judgment, and a supreme preference of the affections for God. They owed obedience and allegiance, and by God’s grace they paid it, even unto death. They loved their divine Lord and Master with generous warmth; and they knew and felt that the best evidence of love was in the sacrifice which they were ready to make for him. How new and how beautiful was the spectacle of early Christianity! The attachment of the disciples to their master, exhibited ardour without passion, and resolution without resentment. They were as calm as they were firm; they were as benevolent as they were exclusive. They loved Christ supremely; but after his own example, they prayed and they

felt for those who were his bitterest foes. Similar sacrifices have been called for in various ages of persecution ; and although at the present time, the liberal spirit of the age excludes the infliction of imprisonment and death ; yet the principle of every real Christian continues to wear the same character, and to produce the same results, under the more mitigated forms of trial by which it may still be assailed. In every case, at this moment, the principle on which a genuine follower of Christ acts, is a principle of entire self-denial, and of absolute resignation to the will of his Saviour. The demand of the gospel is still of the same kind. “ I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” “ Ye are not your own, but ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his.”

The trials to which this principle of self-renunciation is in these days exposed, may be briefly noticed.

1. In the first place, we must point out the *struggle of pride in the individual's own heart*, in the history of his *personal* and *hidden walk* with God. Christianity teaches us that which our own experience amply confirms, that we are criminals in God's sight ; that the

accents of the violated law of God are stern and repulsive; that death and judgment impend over our heads; that in the prospect of all this calamity, our affections continue to be earthly and depraved; and that we are totally indisposed to acknowledge the extent of the claims of God upon our attachment and our service. But under these fearful circumstances, the gospel reveals to us a recital of strange and unmerited compassion. It tells us, that ruined as we are, we need not yet sink under our calamities; that the gratuitous love of God has provided, in the person and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, a full and sufficient atonement for our sins; that the way to God is again freely opened to our outcast race; and that eternal life is now the offered gift of God to the chief of sinners. The revealed record of God is clear and absolute. Jesus Christ is by him constituted the "way, the truth, and the life;" "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world;" "the high priest over the house of God;" the advocate with the Father;" "made of God to every one that believeth, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Now the reception of this clemency, strange as it may appear, is often very painful to human pride. We are naturally self-ignorant; we are familiar with the notions of human dignity, of innocence of character,

and goodness of heart; and these terms are not used as they fairly might be, to denote *degrees of guilt*; but they are used to supersede the notions of guilt altogether, and to induce us to urge even a claim upon the divine regard. Hence, to forego these notions; to bend to the decisions of scripture; to confess that we need mercy, and not reward; to kneel before God, in prostration of our understanding and of our affections; to sue as criminals; to accept an expiation which leaves us nothing to boast; to be indebted for a righteousness, before which our own deeds can never be mentioned; to be saved by a gratuitous act, towards which we can contribute nothing; to owe all of hope for hereafter to the generous mediation of Jesus Christ, and to receive daily strength at his hands by incessant acts of confidence and faith; to do this, is to do an act so contrary to our self-love and self-esteem, that many turn from the demand with indignation; while all struggle more or less with the workings of pride, even in the determination to concede to the whole extent of the sacrifice required. Here is the burden of the cross; here is the combat of self-denial. But in the case of the real Christian, the burden is *carried*, and the *victory is achieved*. Salvation through grace becomes inexpressibly precious to the soul, and the will of God ultimately triumphs over the reluctance of pride!

2. In following out the results of this meditation of Christ, a *hard struggle is likewise often experienced with former habits of sensual indulgence*. The habits of life have, perhaps, been more or less animal, indulgent, licentious. Now Christianity unfolds as the true notions of happiness, spiritual and holy intercourse with God, conformity to his image, and imitation of his excellence. How opposite this notion to that of sensual enjoyment! And what a trial to self-denial is this crucifixion of the flesh, with all its cravings, passions, and desires! But the upright soul meets the struggle, and overcomes in the strength of his God.

3. The principle of self-denial encounters, however, other tests, which meet the individual, not in his solitary walk with God, but in his intercourse with his fellow-creatures. Of these, the first in strength and bitterness, *is the ridicule of friends and associates*. Those who are brought up in truly Christian families, where the habits and the society are Christian, where parental example offers a shelter to spiritual feelings and employments, such have but little idea, perhaps, of the obstacles which the fear of ridicule throws in the path of many who are anxious to follow the counsels of God, but who are surrounded by those who practically, at least, reject that counsel. They have seen the shafts of ridicule pointed against others. The

charge of fanaticism, of religious folly, of methodism, of Calvinism ; the charge of pretending to be better than their neighbours, or of supposing that they are higher than others in the favour of God ; the charge of going a great deal too far in religion, and of distracting the calm and the comfort of their friends ; these and similar charges they have seen affixed to the characters of others ; and now *themselves* to meet all these severe allegations ; to confront, perhaps, contempt and scorn, where formerly they received applause, is to undergo a conflict rendered the more severe in proportion to the kind and social disposition of the individual whom it assails. The true disciple is victorious here likewise, but the battle often costs him much.

4. A heavier trial is sometimes presented to those whose *temporal welfare is entirely dependant upon the support of others*. If they follow a worldly course, they may expect honour, and wealth, and reputation. If they cleave to Jesus Christ in entire sincerity, they may be abandoned and thrown upon their own resources. These cases, more or less, frequently occur, and this is, perhaps, the cross the heaviest to be borne, because it may involve the apparent happiness of the whole life. But grace triumphs here also.

5. *The various calamities of after life or of ma-*

turer years, offer abundant trials to the same principle of self-denial. The loss of health, the loss of property, the death of those, in whose life and affection our very lives were bound up; the blank made in the little circle round which our fondest hopes revolved; these and similar events, often utter to us, as it were, the silent but pointed question, "Canst thou deny thyself, canst thou submit thy will to God? Canst thou carry thy master's cross? Canst thou give up the fairest flowers of earth to wither and to die, in expectation of thy lasting heritage in the regions of bliss."

II. But let us briefly notice THE GROUND ON WHICH OUR SAVIOUR MAKES THIS DEMAND FOR UNLIMITED SELF-DENIAL UPON HIS FOLLOWERS. He brings forward two considerations calculated to sustain the full weight of the application which he makes to this principle. The first is *the tremendous alternative which must inevitably follow disobedience*. He asks, "What shall it profit a man, if he could gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" By the loss of the soul, our Saviour means the loss of the soul's eternal happiness. Eternity is the proper heritage of the soul. This world is but as a momentary preparation for the next. The condition of the individual here scarcely merits notice. It is the eternity

of our condition, which is our true and just condition. What may be our allotment after death is the absorbing consideration; the gain or loss here is every thing. Do we hesitate as to our obedience to Christ, as to our acceptance of his will, his mercy, his grace, his various claims? Then we must meet the result of this refusal, we must come to eternity without his mediation, without his welcome. We must for ever carry the weight of our own sin, and lie down in our own pollution. We must bear the absence of God for ever, voluntarily excluded from his light, his purity, his peace, his joy.

What language can unfold the extent of such a loss? What mind can adequately grasp the mighty subject of perpetual wretchedness? To be placed *beyond* all means of improvement, all hopes of virtue, all society of the good, all the beaming glories of heaven! To gaze for ever on the darkness of despair, and on the associates of evil! To be evermore borne down with the agonizing thought, "I rejected God's plan of mercy, I escaped from his parental yoke. He would have chastised me in love, and by his gracious process of self-denial and of affliction, he would have prepared me for the abodes of bliss and for the society of the just; but I resisted all this grace, and shuddered at the manifestation of all this holy

wisdom and kindness; and thus have I rivetted the chains which bind me down to sin and death! I have shut out by my deliberate worldliness, all future light and all future love of truth, and the Sun of mercy has for ever sunk below my horizon! I have lost my soul! I have trafficked in sin. I have bartered heaven for the fleeting enjoyments of earth!" Now what an alternative is this! Who will thus give up eternal tranquillity, and consign all his hopes to an unfathomed grave? For what end are reason, reflection, memory, imagination given? If not to fasten upon the soul the never-dying truth, that God's favour is worth any sacrifice, and eternal life any earthly suffering! Do we hesitate in religion? Do we shrink before the ridicule of man? How then shall we encounter the contempt of God? Shall we pursue during a moment's calm, the shadows of sensuality and worldliness, even though they should ultimately land us amidst the wrecks and horrors of perdition? Oh, how much wiser to mortify the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of final recompense?

But another and more delightful consideration is suggested by our Saviour to sustain the trial to which the principle of self-denial is exposed; *a consideration not addressed to our fears but to our hopes.* He tells us "that the Son of man will shortly come in the glory of his

Father, to award to his friends eternal salvation."

In the glory of Christ are bound up the life and the glory of his faithful disciples. What is the language of other parts of scripture? "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." "Then shall the tabernacle of God be with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away."

What objects are here on which hope may fasten with all her immortal energy! Does self-denial seem too costly in its requirements, when the fear of ridicule, when the dispensations of Providence, battering down the fabric of our comforts, claim from us the patient burden of the cross, and the resolute adherence to truth and righteousness? Oh what succour, what force may not these promises of glory, addressed directly to our hopes, impart! How short is the conflict, how small the demanded

sacrifice, when measured against the tranquillity of salvation and the blessedness of eternity. The request to *lose* our life for the Redeemer's sake, is never made but under the assurance that we shall *find* it unto life eternal! How munificent, how noble, how generous, do the service and the companionship of Christ thus become when viewed in all their relations! It may sometimes happen, that the *present* aspect of that service and of that fellowship is dark and unpromising. The expression has fallen from the lips of an apostle, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." "But we see now as through a glass darkly." In the night of affliction, imagination frequently augments our sufferings, and the hours pass tardily along; but the day is advancing; the day of rapture and of glory will speedily dispel all this gloom. "Our light affliction," says the same apostle, "is but for a moment, and worketh for us a more abundant and exceeding weight of glory." "Yet a little while, and he that will come shall come; he will not tarry." "Now the just shall live by faith." Grand and inconceivable thought! the few and passing struggles of self-denial shall be followed by the manifestation of God's full and everlasting love! The lot of the Christian is thus the counterpart of the lot of Christ.

“ Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies !”

There is in truth every thing to sustain us in the entire surrender of ourselves to Christ. The result is as certain as it is bright and glorious. Nor must it be forgotten, that while these future scenes of purity, truth, and splendour, are presented to our faith, and are calculated in themselves to awaken all the energies of constancy and courage, we are not left to the mere *force* of noble *principles*. United unto Christ through the medium of our faith, we actually make alliance *with God's strength*, and rest beneath the shadow of his shield! “ *The eternal God himself is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*” The covenant of grace is an unbroken and absolute alliance, and the consolations of the Comforter do not fail to descend upon the soul! The sorrows of self-denial may thus be said even on earth to be largely repaid. Is there not a high consolation in fellowship with ‘God? in the integrity of faith? in the constancy of resolution? in the abandonment of low pleasures and low aims for the lofty and purifying objects of religion? Is there not a great mental refreshment, in the consciousness of advancing with many other generous and kindred spirits

along the paths of holiness and salvation ; in those bright glances which the soul takes into the mysterious gladness of eternity ? Oh, do not these and many other blessings of godliness, often shed over the pains and sacrifices of earth, the very hues and quietness of heaven !

SERMON XVIII.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS.

GALATIANS vi. 7, 8.

“BE NOT DECEIVED, GOD IS NOT MOCKED, FOR WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP. FOR HE THAT SOWETH TO THE FLESH SHALL OF THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION, BUT HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING.”

SELF-DECEPTION, even in the ordinary expectations of human life, is often the forerunner of mortification and defeat. A just judgment of our own powers and habits is very desirable. The results of self-deception in connection with eternity, are, however, far more terrific. Language fails here to express the magnitude of the evil. Hence the multiplied cautions of the scriptures “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling;” “so to run as that we may obtain;” “to sit down, and count the cost;” “to deny ourselves;” “to take up the cross, and to follow Christ” wherever we discern his footsteps, or mark his directions. “If a man,” says the apostle Paul in the context, “think

himself to be somewhat when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself; but let every man prove his own works."

It is to be feared that men are very inconsistent in their expectations for *eternity*. They do not give themselves the trouble to examine into the probable circumstances of the next world. A *general* notion of divine mercy upholds their expectations, and it never occurs to them to consider whether mercy, however indiscriminate, can, in the nature of things, realize such expectations. An unwise and rash child, who should speculate on the unlimited indulgence of his parents, ought not to be surprised if no amount of indulgence should sustain his happiness. The disorder of his own passions would be a sufficient curse, even under the full sunshine of paternal weakness and indulgence. It *may* thus happen hereafter that the mind unadapted to the circumstances of heaven, and destitute of sympathy with the views of God, will find itself, in the very nature of things, allied to wretchedness. Oh, the warning is of the deepest importance. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

Some persons affect, perhaps, to ridicule the idea of anticipating the nature and the character of the immortality which is before us, and throw back as fanatical and puerile, the efforts to lift up the veil which hides the future. But this is certainly to betray great ignorance of the scriptures, for although the *mode* of existence, and the precise employments of the other world are not the subjects of revelation, yet the principles upon which the happiness of its inhabitants depends, are developed with a precision, which seems to leave self-deception without excuse. “God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” This present life thus possesses a peculiar character. It is the seed-time to a future harvest, and the nature of that harvest may be accurately ascertained by a reference to the seed which is now sown. The existing world is a place of education for a higher scene. Every action, therefore, and every sentiment, every mode and habit of thought and of conduct, bears a necessary connection with eternity. There is nothing perhaps, strictly speaking, morally indifferent. Every thing touches upon this internal discipline. Every thing either aggravates evil, or augments good. Every thing tends either to elevate the soul towards its everlasting rest, or to depress it towards its final uneasiness. That

is, we grow more like to God, or more opposed to God by every breath we draw, by every feeling we indulge, by every object we pursue, by every circumstance in which we are involved.

I. But let us endeavour more distinctly to bring before the view, in the *first place*, THE NATURE OF THE HEAVENLY WORLD.

II. And in the *second* let us advert TO THE NECESSARY CONNECTION OF OUR PRESENT CHARACTER WITH THE HAPPINESS OF THAT FUTURE SCENE.

I. THE NATURE OF THE HEAVENLY WORLD is among the distinct subjects of revelation. "It doth not yet appear indeed what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Our Redeemer designated this higher world "as his Father's house of many mansions," as a world in which the links of human society bind no longer, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God," a world "which is incorruptible and undefiled."

Those who inhabit this future world, are rescued from the grave, to wear the resemblance to the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ. "They see him face to face." They serve him day and night." They adore him with an unbroken homage, and with the most fervent love. "They awake up after his likeness," they share the image at once of his eternity, of

his holiness, and of his happiness. They know God, and they find this knowledge to be “life eternal.” They are no more subject to pain, weakness, and decay. The hand of munificent love has wiped away every tear from every face. They experience the “fulness of joy,” and “drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand for evermore.”

Such are a few of the images under which the resurrection to a future life is depicted. We cannot enlarge upon them, but let us remark the outline. The grand feature of this world of felicity is *the presence of Christ, and conformity to his will*. His service, his friendship, his character, his sufficiency, his eternity, his purity; these are the circumstances which throw the brightest radiance over the regions of heaven. Gratitude for redemption from the depravity and wretchedness of a *former* world, is the absorbing sensation of those who share the blessedness of the *new* world. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, unto him be glory, and blessing, and praise.”

It is true that a distinct reference is made to the absence of external suffering. “There shall be no more pain, neither crying, neither death, for the former things are passed away.” “The vile body is fashioned after the glorious body of Jesus Christ,” and “death hath no

more dominion over it." It is true that a joyful allusion is made to the re-union of severed friends, "whom the Lord when he comes will bring with him;" but the prevailing sentiment is an unbroken *gratitude* to Christ, an uninterrupted *service* to him. It is *in his presence* that every promise is to gain its final accomplishment. It is in his approbation that every notion of happiness is to be comprised. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." "For to me to live is Christ, but to die is gain."

It must indeed be obvious to every candid reader of the scriptures, that the *relation* and *intercourse* between Jesus Christ and his followers, is the deep source to them of future and eternal joy. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

II. But let us now the rather pass on to the second point proposed, THE DIRECT AND NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MORAL CHARACTER FORMED ON EARTH, AND THE FELICITY OF THE HEAVENLY WORLD. Our Lord has said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," because "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "To know God, to see God," are in fact expres-

sions which mark out an identity of mind and will between God and those who are privileged to behold him. There cannot be a point of greater conceivable importance than this. For the most fatal delusions enwrap the soul with reference to this approaching eternity. Men appear to think, that by some strange, mysterious process, they will be happy hereafter. That death will make some extraordinary change in their circumstances, and that they may take the present world as they find it, confiding the future to the beneficence of the Supreme Being. But such expectations utterly mock reason and the nature of things. There are certain principles of happiness, and there are certain principles of misery. As all things live, and move, and have their being in God, that will become a happy being which is in full accordance with God's mind and judgment; and that an unhappy being which opposes God's mind and judgment. It is in reference to this indestructible order of things, that the apostle here utters the caution, "Be not deceived, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is nothing arbitrary in the statements of Christianity. We are often, perhaps, disposed to wish that the requirements of religion were less costly; that the claims of self-denial were less urgent, and that the practice of virtue were more in accordance

with our natural tastes and appetites. But what is this but to wish that the order of God's arrangements was reversed, and that law and truth were sacrificed to our disordered passions! If God be happy because he is holy, and if the creation with all its varieties of intellectual existence, be adjusted to the principles of a righteous administration, there is then nothing arbitrary in the requirement that man to be happy must be holy. Christianity has besides developed a mode by which this holiness may be re-imparted to the disordered heart of man; and here, in truth, lies all its value. Christianity is not a harsh and arbitrary refusal to admit the gratification of certain propensities, and to bind down to the practice of certain actions, but it is the manifestation of the divine character in the person of Jesus Christ, it is the illustration of goodness and truth, of pity, love, and grace, embodied in the facts of the cross; it is the discovery of God's kindness and liberality in a manner, and to an extent calculated to win back the affections of the most estranged heart. It is the practical utterance of God's intense desire to satisfy the hearts, and to heal the wounds of those whom sin has defiled and made wretched. It is the unceasing voice of invitation to the forlorn, the weary, and the sad, to link again their hopes and their affections round that which will not wound,

and irritate, and destroy! There is no other *accredited*, no other *known* remedy for our misery. Though in the sunshine of prosperity; though amidst the blandishments of health, fortune, and friends, we may seem to be contented with our lot, yet we are hastening to another world where objects are not mingled as they are in this, but where God has declared that he will sift the chaff from the wheat, and irresistibly manifest his approbation of truth, and his abhorrence of falsehood! Under such circumstances and under such prospects, there can be no lasting honour, tranquillity, or joy, but in the accordance of our tastes, wishes, and desires, with the recorded decisions of God. Should any one, therefore, be disposed to assert that what he calls a strict religion is painfully incompatible with the ordinary habits and tastes of society, and that, what by some are denominated the frivolities of life are, in fact, the best adapted to the leisure and to the propensities of our nature; before he decides this question, let him honestly inquire into the infallible result of the two sets of principles here involved. Let him ask whether he be prepared to put himself ultimately into conflict with God, and to resist the operation of his eternal administration of the universe? The harvest must certainly be of the same kind with the seed sown, “ He that soweth to

the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." And is not **this** reasonable? Is there any thing in these statements of Christianity, repugnant to the very notions we are ourselves habituated to form of human conduct? Should a servant put out of his calculation the wishes and directions of his master, and give to others the time and the thoughts which he withdraws from that master, can he be reasonably at least surprised, if the favour and protection of that master be withdrawn from him? if he be left to the care and friendliness of those among whom he has associated? Or should a child never connect his views of comfort and respectability with the love and counsels and wishes of his parents, but should adjust his mode of life to the bent of his own particular propensities, can he with reason be surprised, if ultimately the tenderness of paternal intercourse should cease to be his lot? And yet shall it be thought unreasonable to suppose, that the man who adjusts his habits of life to his own propensities, and who pays to God but the distant homage of a ceremonial service, should ultimately be rejected from the love and approbation of that God? With what shadow of sound sense can he anticipate a different result? He has sown to the flesh, and to the flesh must he look

for his harvest. He has arranged his life to please himself. However *moderate* in his worldliness, it was still “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life” which gave vigour to his efforts, and zest to his enjoyments. However beneficent his views to his fellow-creatures, however amiable his domestic conduct, these beneficent or these domestic projects gave exclusive occupancy to his mind. But God’s wishes and God’s love were placed at a great distance, and gave no hallowed colouring to the tastes and habits of his life. Can it then be unreasonable to bid such persons look to these worldly resources for their future harvest? If they have sowed to ambition, to external gratification, to social hilarity, or to the progress of human science, is it unreasonable to bid them look to these objects for their rest and reward? And of what avail, it may be asked, will be these resources in a world where, as far as we can judge, they will no longer possess the power to excite or to reward. On the other hand, if the character has been formed upon the principles of Christianity, if we have yielded up our affections to God our Saviour; if touched by the manifestation of his pure and gratuitous mercy, we have given back to him as his just right, the homage of our gratitude and love; if sensible of the baseness and folly of our pre-

vious revolt from his law, we have gladly sought the shelter of his atonement, and relied upon the merits of his intercession ; if affected by the discovery of his excellence, his wisdom, his kindness, his long-suffering, his purity, we have become imitators of his character, and have constantly laboured to conform our plans, wishes, and pursuits to the standard of his will and to the decisions of his infinite intelligence ; if intercourse with him by prayer as with the friend, who though unseen, has been ever tenderly anxious for our welfare ; if such intercourse has been pleasant and refreshing to our hearts ; if the contemplation of his perfections, as delineated in his holy word has been delightful to us, and we have yielded up our whole bosom to the consolations of his love, then it is evident that we have been training up to a capacity to comprehend and to enjoy his fuller manifestations of wisdom and of grace. Then we are *prepared* to see him *face to face*, to cast ourselves at his feet, as rescued from a thralldom of sense at once cruel and destructive to our real dignity and repose. Then we are prepared to rejoice, that death should remove the barrier which intercepts our perfect communion with God. Then we are prepared to hail our emancipation from the shackles and sadness of this present existence, and to spring forth into the glorious liberty of the sons of God ! The absence

of sinful objects and of sinful excitements, the expansion of our faculties in the pure light of truth, the society of kindred and of perfect beings, and above all, the presence of Jesus Christ, under circumstances which promise and insure an unbroken gratitude, and an uninterrupted service to him; these events, cannot but render immortality unspeakably delightful, while they render perfectly *intelligible* the happiness of such a world. There is here no mystery, no juggle, no proselytism, no priestcraft, no unaccountable change to be produced by death. The harvest is consistent with the seed sown. We have sowed to the Spirit; we have believed the record which God has given of his Son; we have come into contact with the healing communications of his grace; we have felt the adaptation of Christianity to our wants and to our sorrows; we have clung to it as to our asylum from the passions which wound, and from the propensities that pollute our peace. We have felt the attraction of the cross, and we have become conformed to its spiritual interpretation. Our religion has been our happiness, we have felt the sensation already adverted to by the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

To a mind in this state; to a mind thus quickened from the death of sin, and thus

made alive unto God ; to a mind thus buoyant with gratitude and love ; thus hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; thus recoiling with pain at the touch of evil, and longing to reach the spiritual standard of Christ ; to a mind which thus connects all its hope, its refreshment, its enjoyment with the unmerited and unmeasured love of Jesus Christ ; to such a mind it is perfectly intelligible, that death should be gain ; to such a mind it is quite intelligible, that the rending of the veil which now conceals eternity, should be productive of a felicity which the limited power of human language must fail to express. Such a mind reaps at the hands of the Spirit “ eternal life.”

Let then our anxious attention be yielded to this indissoluble connection between *character* and *allotment* ; between worldliness and ruin ; between godliness and felicity. The language of the Bible is surely precise upon this point. It were indeed an inadequate revelation, were it not thus precise. It would but mock our expectations. If God be supreme, happiness can only be enjoyed in his favour, and in his intercourse.

We have every reason to believe that death will put the stamp of eternity upon our views and principles. There is not a more awful, though not a more reasonable declaration, than that which is recorded upon the last page of

revelation. “The time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” The seal of perpetuity appears here to be laid upon human character. It appears to shut out any future discipline, any ulterior opportunities of instruction in righteousness. Thus, where the tree falls, there it lies. According to the seed is the harvest. Corruption on the one hand; eternal life on the other.

If then the precise allotments of the other world be unseen, the *principles* upon which those allotments will rest are not concealed. He that loves God, will be welcomed to God’s felicity. He that loves his own pleasure, as independent of God’s will and favour, will be excluded from the manifestations of that favour, and will be necessarily consigned to that awful and terrific society, over which God cannot be supposed to stretch out a paternal or protecting arm!

Let us conceive of heaven rather as a state of *character*, than as a *local habitation*; and let us judge by our cherished and prevailing propensities, whether or not we are ripening for its enjoyments. Tremendous consideration! Good and evil, joy or woe, are not, we repeat, arbitrary distinctions; but are the necessary

results of certain habits of mind, of certain trains of thought, of certain modes of moral action !

Not even omnipotence could render vice happy, or levity of mind productive of peace, except such a result could be found amidst the anarchy of every element of the moral world ! Woe, woe, then must be to him who hopes to break down the decisions of the Almighty ; or to stand harmless in a conflict with eternal justice and truth !

Oh then for the warning voice which should reach the heart, and turn back the wanderer from his fatal course ! “Awake, awake, thou that sleepest in thy sins, and Christ shall give thee light.” “Turn unto the strong-hold, thou prisoner of hope ;” and escape the perdition which overhangs thy head !

Let the earnestness of these remarks be forgiven ; they are offered with humility, with affection, with anxiety ! Time rolls on. We shall soon realise the truth of revelation in our *personal* experience. The moment will shortly reach us, when the remembrance of sin will be bitter ; when faded pleasures will be insipid ; when rank, wealth, power, science, friends, and children, and the dearest connections of the soul, will *fail to stand in the place of God* ! The moment will shortly arrive, when mere opinions will be useless ; when even orthodox theology will be vain ; when to have called,

“Lord, Lord,” in all the rigid accuracy of evangelical expression, will carry no conviction of tranquillity to the heart! The moment will quickly reach us, when nothing short of a distinct, and grateful, and conscious, and affectionate union with Christ, will avail to bless and to save! Salvation is indeed utterly and altogether of grace. And the saved soul will gladly cast down its crown of joy at the Redeemer’s feet. But the decisions of his final tribunal are according to the *works* and *habits* of the present time! The approbation of God is according to the reality of allegiance. “Well done, thou *good* and *faithful* servant, enter *thou* into the joy of thy Lord.” The light of glory is the same light with that of grace. The bliss of heaven is of the same kind with the bliss sent down to this lower world. The flowers of paradise have their roots in the soil of earth. At a certain stage of their growth here, they are transplanted into the region where blight is no longer feared, and where the wintry winds sweep over them no more!

SERMON XIX.

HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATT. v. 6.

“BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER
RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.”

“MANY things,” observed our blessed Saviour, “which are highly esteemed amongst men, are abomination in the sight of God.” Now the *converse* of this assertion is equally true; a remark which especially forces itself upon our attention, while listening to the sacred details of the “sermon on the mount.” This sermon contains an enumeration of virtues the most spiritual and refined; but they are virtues which have never gained any warm applause from mankind. They were peculiarly repugnant to the nation to whom they were originally commended. The Jews were, as a nation, proud, censorious, resentful, covetous, vain-glorious. The religious advantages which they enjoyed, had inflated them with conceit. Their

patriotism was a cold contempt for other nations. Their attachment to their friends was little better than a hatred of their foes. Of spiritual intercourse with God; of that pure love of our country which leads us to toil for its progress in humanity, knowledge, and virtue; of that holy friendship which is built upon the sympathies and charities of a higher world; of that humility which results from a keen perception of unworthiness before God; of that gratitude which arises from long continued, but utterly unmerited kindness; of these virtues they had no conception. We cannot indeed imagine a series of mental qualities more completely at variance with all their notions of felicity, than those eulogised by our Saviour in the commencement of this address to his disciples. How strange the declaration to the proud and self-confident—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

But human nature is more or less the same in every age and country. Under various modifications, and subject to local peculiarities,

man is every where the same proud and earthly being, opposing much that God approves, and applauding much that God condemns. For where is to be found that country in which humility and poverty of spirit, meekness and tenderness of temper, purity and righteousness of heart, are virtues of spontaneous growth? And yet these are the qualities upon which God has stamped the seal of his approbation.

In reference to the words of the text, let us consider,

I. THE CONDITION OF MIND DESCRIBED UNDER THE IMAGE, "HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS."

II. THE BLESSING TO WHICH IT LEADS.

I. The expression, "TO HUNGER AND TO THIRST," is frequently employed by the sacred writers in a figurative sense. Thus, in the book of Psalms, "O God, my soul thirsteth for thee in a dry and barren land, where no water is." Thus the prophet Isaiah—"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" Thus St. John—"And the spirit and the bride say come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the waters of life freely." In all these passages, as in the text, "thirst," is evidently figurative; and it seems to denote an unequivocal and ardent desire of the soul, after

some spiritual object ; a desire which is aptly illustrated by the thirst to which the body is exposed ; a sensation, which when excessive, is very urgent, and, until satisfied, very painful. And the objects which call forth these desires, are “ God,” “ the water of life,” “ righteousness.”

The state of mind then to which the blessing of our Saviour is promised, is one of eager and anxious *desire* ; not for objects earthly, sordid, transitory, and polluted ; but for objects holy, spiritual, and heavenly. It is the stretching forth of the soul towards that which is pure and ethereal : the very panting of the heart for God ; for the enjoyment of his favour ; for the intercourse of his friendship ; for the illumination of his spirit ; for the “ unsearchable riches of his grace.” It is the honest and unchecked aspiration after the knowledge and imitation of Jesus Christ. It is the daily approaches of the soul to the fountain of mercy, strength, and peace, under sensations of misery and emptiness, which no fulness but that of God can satisfy.

It is evident, that this state of mind is the result of *a deliberate choice of God, as the only real and substantial good*. The man who thus hungers and thirsts after righteousness, has discovered the surpassing excellence of that righteousness ; he has an actual taste and relish

for its enjoyment. He has compared this righteousness with other sources of felicity, and he feels its decided superiority. He has surveyed his situation as an immortal creature. He has realised his connection with God and with the world—with the world as a momentary tabernacle, ready to crumble and decay; with God, “as the city that hath foundation,” “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” He has grown familiar with the important assurances of revelation. He has brought into vivid and intelligent contrast the condition of a sinner proudly dependant on his own resources, and taking the world as his heritage; and the condition of a sinner leaning upon God, and accepting eternal redemption through his grace. These conditions he has weighed “in the balances of the sanctuary.” In the one scale he has placed Earth, with its sin, levity, vanity, remorse, disappointment, decay, death, perdition: in the other scale, he has placed Heaven, with its repentance, faith, purity, peace, joy, substantial riches, eternal life; and he has recollected with astonishment the day, when he practically seemed to think that the first scale would weigh down the last! His eyes are now opened—his judgment is disabused—he now casts away the world, and “lays hold of eternal life.” He now is made “a new creature.” The Spirit of God is become his Teacher and

his Comforter. He now associates felicity with holiness; he perceives God to be infinitely happy, because he is infinitely holy; and that when God says to man, “be ye holy, for I am holy,” it is as if he had said, “be ye happy, for I am happy.”

How lovely now is the character of God in his eyes!—how transcendentally glorious the work of his atoning grace!—how productive his benevolence!—how bright and harmonious his attributes!—how ennobling and honourable his service! How attractive now to his heart the person, the wisdom, the tenderness, the energy of Jesus Christ! How intelligible now the confession of *one* apostle, “whom having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice in him with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” How reasonable and luminous now the requisition of *another* apostle—“None of us liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself; but whether we live we live to the Lord, and whether we die we die to the Lord; whether therefore living or dying, we are the Lord’s; for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.”

This change of mind and taste, denoted by hunger and thirst after righteousness, is by far the most momentous event which ever takes place on earth. The spiritual world is the im-

portant world: amidst its elements what a grasp of sorrow or of joy can the soul take!—what a capacity for anguish or for bliss is there unfolded! It was in reference to this capacity, and to this final destiny, that our Lord declared the conversion of a sinner to carry fresh accessions of felicity to the bright intelligencies of the heavenly regions. The great march of external occupation—the vicissitudes of earth—the rise and fall of empires—the progress of human science; these objects detached from any connection with their spiritual results, are utterly insignificant; “*these all shall wax old, as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up;*” while the renewal of a sinner’s heart to holiness is an event linked to the very sympathies of the Eternal Mind! “*For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, WITH HIM also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*”

And this desire of the newly converted soul after holiness, is not only a deliberate choice made upon a wise and intelligent reference to the value of holiness, but it has become a principle *implanted* in the soul, which abides, and *progressively expands its fruits*: it is of God, and it perishes not within the breast. It is not a

caprice, an emotion of genius, a transitory impulse, which like a summer torrent from the mountains flows away—it is rather a process of internal healing, which God himself directs, in order to render the soul capable of its true felicity : it is rather the implantation of a principle, which will put forth a productive and celestial vigour—which will meet the shock of external tempest, which will survive the pressure of temptation and of difficulty. Bad as is the natural soil in which it is placed, bleak and cold as is the atmosphere into which it grows up—yet it takes deep root, and gradually unfolds its branches and its blossoms. God has deigned to take charge of its culture, and hence it withers, it dies not. “ *Ye are trees of the Lord’s planting, that he may be glorified.*”

The *difficulties* which a serious mind encounters under this important change are frequently many and afflictive. Consider the case. A man once of the spirit and temper of the world, becomes thoughtful about his soul, his Saviour, his God. He is conscious of new emotions, of higher anxieties striving within him ; he wishes to be more religious ; he has long deemed himself unworthy of God’s regard ; he has palpably neglected God ; he has violated his good and valuable laws ; he has sought his happiness within the narrow boundaries of sense. He may have clung to a form of

religion, and uttered in manhood the prayers of his infancy; but his heart has been in the world: he recollects all this, and is humiliated. He tears away disguise from his bosom; he probes his disease; he is conscious of its inveteracy. But how shall he effect a cure? He finds it difficult, exceedingly difficult to become more religious: his mind is inconstant, his emotions of penitence are more or less fugitive; his temptations recur with violence and frequency; yet, he seeks after God. There is a voice within, from whose anxious and urgent accents he cannot escape. This whispers to him perpetually, "God is love;" "Christ is mighty;" "awake thou that sleepest;" "save thy soul from destruction." But what shall he do?—he finds perhaps no single friend within his knowledge to whom the subject of religion is one of interest. This man he sees occupied with his fortune and his gains—that man with his pleasures—this man with his philosophical researches—that man with his domestic circle. But where is the man whose anxieties are spiritual; whose soul is athirst for God; whose imagination is at work upon eternity? Where is the man with whom he can hold sacred communion upon the awful realities of heaven and hell? The mention of such subjects is deemed to cast a chilly shade over the social hour. Some would shrink from them as from topics

too awful and distressing for mutual communication: "these are subjects," it would be replied, "between a man and his God; and are not to be obtruded on society." Others would ridicule his anxiety, and deem it absolutely fanatical. His nearest associates would perhaps be the first to decry any tendency to too much religion. Now the conviction of all this is painful and repulsive: no one likes singularity; few stand unmoved before a sneer. The man who has raised his head unappalled amidst the thunders of battle, lowers his firm front before the laugh of the scorner. But if this change of heart be from God, he will meet his obstacles with patience, though with pain; he will acquire a firmer step, he will exhibit resolution; he will apply to the sanctuary for strength: he cannot fling away his soul; he cannot lose eternity: he cannot "crucify his Lord afresh." Gratitude is a term added to the vocabulary of his heart. "Where is God my Maker?" "Lord, unto whom but unto thee can I go? thou hast the words of eternal life!" The Spirit of God will cherish and accept these aspirations of his heart; he hungers and thirsts, and "he shall be filled."

Now it is of the deepest moment to any one in this condition of mind, to *recognise distinctly the actual method which God has revealed in order to new mould the human heart.* The natural

effort of the sinner is *to save himself by his own works*. Even after an unfeigned confession of his unworthiness, even after many honest avowals of the necessity of mercy and pardon, he is prone to rest much upon the integrity of his repentance, the sincerity of his prayers, the acts of his piety ; but he will learn by bitter experience, and by the light of God's Spirit that there is absolutely " no health in him ;" that he must come as a beggar to receive alms ; as a bankrupt to be rescued from the claims of his creditor ; as a slave to be liberated ; as a criminal to be pardoned. He must owe all his salvation to Jesus Christ. Let this truth then be *at once and perpetually recognised, that Jesus Christ is the only channel of successful communication with God*. The medicines which heal the human heart are in his hands : we may search the wide world in vain for other remedies ; we must go TO HIM, and receive them " without money and without price." " If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins." " Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Do we wish then to be wisely religious ? Do we desire to be saved alike from the pollution as from the guilt of sin ? Do we " hunger and thirst after righteousness ? Let us without hesitation *repose our whole confidence in Jesus*

Christ. Rivers of tears can never wash away the stains of iniquity. Ten thousand acts of what we term virtue, can never atone for one act which God calls sin. Nor can human merit be even *mingled* with the gracious work of mercy. It cannot be that we should lay the foundation of acceptance in the sincerity of our piety, and Christ should raise the superstructure by his eternal merits. He will never yield the glory of our redemption; this is “the travail of his soul,” by which his generous heart will alone “be satisfied.” Even then, as the outcast mariner struggling with the waves would cling to the arm stretched forth to save, so let us grasp hold of Christ, that He may rescue us from the horrors of everlasting ruin! Oh! this is the imperishable record; “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And when thus united unto Christ, we shall gratefully discover the *value* and the *privilege of a life of secret prayer*. The eager “thirst after righteousness,” will excite to intercourse with God. How little does a man understand of the nature of prayer until he becomes solicitous as to the state of his spiritual affections! What a cold, heartless worship are the prayers of the majority of mankind! What a crowd of earthly

images encircle the soul, even in the very utterance of its petitions! What self-esteem is retained and cherished even amidst the confessions of sin!—how little reverence, how little gratitude, how little love! What a spiritual mockery!—what a carcase without a spirit! ,

But when eternity presses upon the thoughts; when heaven and hell are recognised as undying realities, as conditions of character susceptible of the thrills of joy or of the shudders of woe; when the love of a crucified Saviour comes into healing union with the heart, how different are the emotions excited by prayer. It is then no longer a matter of indifference whether or not the voice ascend to God, or be wasted upon the desert air! Perhaps there is not a more satisfying evidence of true conversion of heart to God, than the warmth and importunity of secret prayer: to *pray fervently* is to *feel intensely*: to *pray importunately*, is to value God's friendship at a high price. Prayer under these circumstances becomes a habit of cordial, grateful, and efficient intercourse with God.

II. It remains yet to notice THE BLESSING TO WHICH THE SOUL'S HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS INFALLIBLY CONDUCTS.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and

thirst after righteousness, *for they shall be filled.*" The blessing promised is twofold: it respects the *certainty* and the *measure* of our ultimate and eternal recompence. The *certainty*; "for ye shall be filled." Other desires and pursuits may plunge us into disappointment and despair; this shall gratify our largest expectations. The *absolute certainty of disappointment* to those who are eagerly in search of earthly enjoyments, is deeply afflictive to a humane mind. Look at the young, the rich, the beautiful, the prosperous—animated by hope, credulous of joy, sustained by inexperience of evil, they cherish and indulge the keen thirst for sublunary pleasures! A few years roll away. The flower has shed its leaves. The young, the animated, the beautiful, sleep in the dark silence of the grave!—and if this world were all their heritage, they are bankrupts for eternity! But mark the lot of him who is "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" who is in full and eager pursuit of eternal life. Has God ever blighted the prospects, or baffled the efforts of such a man? Has God ever refused to realise the expectations which his own promises have excited in the soul? It cannot be: the first fruits of a rich and eternal harvest, such a man has already received. He already possesses a peace of heart which survives the shocks of ad-

versity, and which actually prevails to shed quietness over many of the agitations of earth—a peace, which his future struggles with calamity shall not impair, and which shall be his firm associate even through the cold solitudes of the valley of the shadow of death!

And when at length such a man has reached the world to which the warm affections of his heart are linked, is it fairly conceivable that he then will complain of final disappointment? Will he then declare his hopes to have been too elevated, his anticipations too bright and sanguine? Oh! could we break through the dense barriers of mortality, and associate with the souls who are lodged safe in the bosom of their God; could we become familiar with their sensations and their joys, is it imaginable that one accent of regret would mingle with the recital of their welcome into a world of triumph, and purity, and repose? Would they not tell us that in the fulness of their felicity, disappointment found no place? Would they not tell us, that their desires were amply gratified, their affections fully occupied? “They hunger no more, neither thirst any more; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne leads them into fountains of living water, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes.” Thus, if their

peace be *certain* its *measure* is *full*. “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness, and when I shall wake up after thy likeness, I shall be *satisfied* with it.” “Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is the *fulness* of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more.”

SERMON XX.

THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE.

PSALM xc. 12.

“SO TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS, THAT WE MAY APPLY
OUR HEARTS UNTO WISDOM.”

THE frailty of our being; the certainty of our death; the shortness of the intervening period; these are ideas with which we are familiar; and yet, strange to say, they seldom influence us, either justly or constantly. The Psalmist prays, not without a correct reference to our ordinary habits of mind, “*so teach* us to number our days,” that we may *profit* by our knowledge of their brevity. We may use this knowledge, in order to add to stoical indifference; to give pathos and interest to poetry; to induce certain arrangements with respect to our property or our families; to augment, by contrast, the enjoyment of the passing hour; but these are not the essential purposes to which our knowledge of the shortness of life ought to be applied.

In the midst of all these speculations we may fail to “apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

The grand end of our brief existence on earth, is a preparation for eternity. He lamentably exposes his happiness to hazard, who is not wise for a better world.

The words of our text express,

I. THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE.

II. OUR INDISPOSITION WISELY TO CONTEMPLATE THE RESULTS OF THAT BREVITY.

III. AND THE NECESSITY FOR A DIVINE INFLUENCE, IN ORDER TO FASTEN THESE RESULTS UPON OUR ATTENTION.

I. The Psalmist refers to THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE. What is the history of man? A history of interrupted schemes, of frustrated enterprise, of disappointed expectations, of withered hopes, of perpetual decay, of unarrested death! The law of destruction operates, without exemption, through every rank of age and of society. One half of the human population are said to die during infancy. Some reach the zenith of their beauty, their intelligence, and their strength. Friends fondly gaze upon the bright promise of future success, when death suddenly darkens the scene, and shrouds every promise in the grave! Some however pursue and overtake their schemes, and walk with firm step to the last period of threescore years and ten! Yet is

their strength soon discovered to be labour and sorrow; and the "tale of their years is told." "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." In arrest of this sentence, no man is successful—no man is strong. Against this destiny, no sagacity and no prosperity can build up a shelter. The barrier which appeared the firmest, sometimes proves to be the weakest. The flower which we hoped would shed its fragrance over the evening hour, scatters its blossoms ere the sun has reached its meridian!

But how trite are these remarks! Our days are numbered. Who refuses to admit the brevity of life?

II. We go on therefore to observe, OUR INDISPOSITION TO CONTEMPLATE WISELY THE RESULTS OF THAT BREVITY.

Is not death an unwelcome subject, to which the mind is forced with reluctance, and from which it escapes with alacrity? Now an escape from pain is clearly wise, if thereby its aggravated recurrence be not rendered more probable. It appears highly probable, that the painful associations connected with death, will be ultimately augmented by the refusal to admit their immediate contemplation. Death will introduce us to new modes of existence; to new scenes of activity; to new departments of knowledge; to a new and more direct contact

with the mind of the Almighty. To be in conformity with the decisions of that MIND, will then constitute happiness. To be opposed to the decisions of that MIND, will constitute misery. Hence, to chase away from the view the results of death, is to refuse all preparation for that last interview with God ; is to waste the powers of intellect, and the strong sensibilities of the heart, upon interests which we cannot perpetuate, and to neglect those interests which will connect themselves with all the periods of our eternity. Our moral sentiments can be brought alone into accordance with the will of God, by our knowledge and contemplation of that will ; and the larger portion of such knowledge refers to the condition of our existence beyond the grave. To reject the results of death from the thoughts, is therefore to make death an unlimited evil ; is to deepen all its horrors, and to preclude effectually any cheerful prospect into eternity. Yet are not the incessant efforts of the majority of mankind directed to escape from this fair and reasonable contemplation of death ? It is readily conceded, that the animal courage of men rarely shrinks from the *act* of dying. In this respect, men share fortitude with the beasts of prey. Hence a brave man, who simply dies with no stain upon his courage, achieves very little more than the lion of the forest achieves. In the

judgment of an intelligent creature, the *act of dying* ought to be esteemed the least part of death. That which follows death ; the introduction to another world ; responsibility ; judgment to come ; the vision of God ; eternal weal or woe ; the friendly or unfriendly mediation of Christ ; the spiritual character which welcomes or opposes the celestial manifestations of truth and wisdom ; these are the associations which properly belong to death. Yet from this view of death, men deliberately turn away ! Men who have lived in constant familiarity with the external shock of death ; who have braved, during the lapse of years, the fury of disease and battle, have yet refused to trace the subject beyond the mere fact of bodily destruction. Perhaps they are actually disposed to decry as gloomy fanaticism, any attempt to realise the scenes and the sensations to which this external dissolution may lead. They are disposed to ridicule, as misplaced and unsocial, any misgivings of the heart, which might result from the laws of justice and of moral government. But is this rational ? Is it wise to close our eyes upon events which may prove terrific ? Or to despise blessings on which it surpasses the power of the human intellect to stamp an adequate value ? Is it besides an ingredient of true courage, to act blindly, or under the mere impulse of

natural instinct? Then does brute force go beyond human effort; and courage belongs rather to nerve and muscle, than to the attributes of the soul.

But may it not happen, that an unprepared entrance into eternity shall force the soul into a conflict far more dreadful than any earth-born controversy? In that higher world, may not events and sensations confront us, before whose gigantic powers the mightiest courage will stand appalled? May not the strife, the agony, become purely mental? May there not exist unfathomed depths of utter loneliness, where God shall chain down the conscience, however reluctant, to a long and terrible communion with all its past history! Where all that gave zest to earthliness shall be removed, and the long silenced voices of truth shall carry their loud appeal to the heart, and waken from its repose "the gnawing worm" which never dies!

Can it then be otherwise than afflictive to a humane mind, to observe the anxiety which men evince to chase into distance and indistinctness, the idea of moral responsibility; to get clear away from all efficient recollection of judgment to come, and to throw over each fleeting scene all the possible brilliancy of sensual attraction. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," becomes the practical, though

unuttered language of life." "Let us hide, if possible, every dark and fearful vestige of eternity; and let us shed over the regions through which we pass the glowing hues of present enjoyment. The bright moments of earth are sufficiently fugitive. Our inevitable doom will come; but let us not spoil *one* world by gloomy anticipations of *another*." This scheme pervades the moral framework of human society. It gives birth to all the wearisome efforts of dissipation. It calls forth mirth, however hollow. It shuns reflection, however just. Thus we make no intelligent preparation for that vast futurity, which our very reluctance to contemplate, might induce us to suspect to be a fearful evil. Should it be replied, that this is an uncandid allegation, for that a good and honourable life is itself the best preparative for death; we must still affirm that to be a mournful negligence of the future, which, at best, gives up all to hazard; or rather, which, in the very face of God's revelation, builds up hopes, which the evolutions of eternity will dissolve, as the sear leaves disperse before the wintry storm!

Were we honest and serious, we should gain all the religious knowledge of which our circumstances admit; we should cling with gratitude to the mediation of Jesus Christ; we should not blush to be suspected of too much

religion ; we should love to collect around us all the glowing proofs of God's kindness, and associate his friendship with all our notions of felicity. But this seriousness of mind is intolerable to the majority of mankind. The great object is to be gay and unembarrassed. If the sun shines, the distant tempest may be forgotten. And whenever painful events occur ; whenever death approaches so near as to urge the impressive warning, that no amount of physical strength is any barrier against his attack ; whenever, by his severer providences, God would address an unearthly counsel to the hearts of survivors ; how ungratefully do we reject his solicitude, and close our ears to the accents of his love ! We are struck, perhaps, for the moment ; we are appalled and affected ; we admit such calamities to be shocking ; but our eager effort is now to diminish the solemn impression. We will not allow these events to carry forward our thoughts into eternity. We shut out from our imagination, alike the reckonings of justice, and the possibilities of salvation. When the rude shock is a little relieved, we speed back, with all our wonted animation, to the scenes of folly ; to the voices of hilarity ; to the thoughtless routine of frivolous, debilitating amusements ! The personal application, " be ye also ready," we deem to be harsh and repulsive ; and we fatally thrust it from the

salutary hold it might otherwise seize of our consciences and our hearts !

III. Thus situated, thus exposed, thus beguiled, how palpable becomes the truth, THAT A WISE USE OF OUR CONVICTION OF MORTALITY, IS THE GIFT OF GOD. “So *teach* us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.” Unless God shall deign to teach, we refuse to learn. The means of instruction are indeed abundant. Much knowledge is afloat in the world ; and the daily events of life utter solemn accents, were we disposed to listen. But the machinery of instruction ; the apparatus of revelation ; the combination of events, are inadequate to make us wise. These are the *means* of wisdom, but they are not *the disposition to be wise*. The conversion of the heart is from God. The will to avail ourselves of mercy ; the practical resolution to admit, and to abide by, God’s decisions ; the honest question, “ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ; ” the serious avowal of spiritual ignorance, depravity, and guilt ; the grateful leaning of the heart upon the wondrous atonement of the cross ; the eager solicitude, by mental preparation, to meet the near approaches of death and eternity ; this is to receive at God’s hands, a gift, additional to, and distinct from, the recorded revelations of his will, or the external lessons of his providence ! This

is emphatically to be *taught of God*; this is to have deep and lasting impressions of futurity! “*Open* thou mine eyes, and I shall behold wondrous things in thy law.” “Ye believed, as the Lord *gave* to every man.” “I have planted, and Apollos watered, but God *gave* the increase.”

All right and holy affections, the legitimate product of religious knowledge, are referred in the scriptures to the direct operation of God’s Spirit upon the heart. And the moral history of life accords precisely with this statement. The most urgent and *attractive* appeals from God to men, frequently fail to make the slightest impression, because they can secure no attention. Or the *sterner* providence of God sweeps away their comforts, but they are equally callous to the warning. They hear that their days are numbered, but they apply not their hearts unto wisdom.

Others, however, once as thoughtless and as earthly in their sensations as the rest of their fellow-creatures, now accept with interest the same truths, which in former days they rejected as the very dreams of folly. Their attention is now arrested, they listen, they compare, they meditate, they feel. They now stand astonished before the high and generous character of God. They contemplate with heart-stirring interest the recorded annals of

his patience, his compassion, and his love! They gaze with never to be averted eyes, upon that spectacle of grace, the atonement of the cross! They hear with mysterious efficacy the parental accents, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." No sounds of earthly melody ever charmed and soothed like these! They believe the record, and their faith *abides*, and exerts a benignant influence upon the heart. They feel themselves to be defiled, guilty, lost; and casting off the insensibility of the past, cling to him who came to pardon and to save! The mercy of God now, indeed, is "sweet," and Christ is "precious." Under the genial influences of divine grace, the frozen heart is now unbound, and the stream of its affections flows towards God! They now desire to "take his easy yoke," and to carry his "light burden;" to break from the galling shackles of sense and sin, and to consecrate their liberated faculties to the God who formed them for himself. They *too*, it may be, are smitten by the hand of his Providence; but they no longer turn away from its pressure! They now hear the "rod," and welcome the import of the blow! They retire from the din and turmoil of the world, "to commune with their own hearts." They now connect the sadnesses of disease and of death with responsibility and judgment. They pronounce a wisdom which labours to bring beneath its

culture the wilderness of time, and is reckless of the fairer regions of eternity, to be unworthy of its name. They now determine the friendship of God to be their best heritage, and the healing of the diseased heart to be his richest gift. The scriptures now appear inexpressibly attractive, revealing God in all his bright and mighty attributes to their minds. The pursuits of human science find now their subordinate place ; while “ to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent,” they find to be “ life eternal.” To be allowed and invited to “ pour out their hearts” to Christ, to confess to him in hours of meditation, with which a stranger intermeddleth not, their weakness and their wants, to lodge the whole burden of their guilt and sorrow in his bosom, and to anticipate their final admission into his everlasting rest ; such converse with God is become *essential*, while it is *adequate* to their peace ! Their strong anxiety is now to live as rational creatures, to open their hearts to all the glowing influences of grace ; to see God in all the details of their moral history, to think ; and feel, and act as God thinks, and feels, and acts ; to adopt his views, to abet his cause, to batter down every barrier to his fuller intercourse, and to imitate incessantly his purity and truth !

Now the whole change in the moral and spiritual character of these persons is attri-

butable to God. The pages of revelation, the events of Providence, or the counsels of friendship have been the medium through which a HOLY INFLUENCE has touched their minds, **but** God himself has directed the sacred process. **He has** rivetted the attention; he has removed préjudice; he has opened the heart; he has excited emotion; he has attracted the affections; he has taught them to send forward their hopes and joys into *eternity*, by disclosing to them the lovely attributes of that religion with which eternity is associated. Oh what cause for gratitude will such minds discern in this, their religious history! They once lived in the utter darkness of levity and sin. They broke away perhaps with coldness and disdain from all the finer ties of conscience and of religion? What has made the difference? Whence has proceeded the change? The gospel is now their theme of peace and joy. The Saviour of a ruined world has become their guide, their companion, and their friend; and the eager pursuit of his full redemption now comprises all that merits their solicitude and invites their regard. Mysterious, momentous change! It is *the gift of God*. He has taught them. “*Not by works of righteousness which they have done, but by his mercy he has saved them.*” They have here no ground for self-esteem. They have *received* all, they have deserved *no*-

thing. It is theirs to sink low in the dust, and to put forth the **daily song of adoration** to him who hath thus “*loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood.*” Still exposed to the assaults of Satan, to the temptations of the world, and to the inconstancy of their own hearts, it is now their exalted privilege to “walk humbly with God.” They will daily need the teaching of his Spirit, and the “virtue” of his great atonement. Aware that religious feelings are at first faint and fugitive, and yet that it is by *deep impressions* the heart is made better, it will be their anxious effort to *abide in the truth*; to live, as it were, amidst the hopes, and images, and joys, and sympathies of a higher world; to guard against the ever-shifting and seductive influences of sense; and to become progressively familiar with all the bright and elevating realities revealed by the gospel!

And thus the *brevity* of life may become to them a subject if of *caution*, so even of *delight*. That their days are numbered; that to-morrow contains no promise of prolonged and external enjoyment; this will make them watchful against the undue pressure either of earthly cares or of earthly comforts; this will make them moderate, and wise in the use of momentary blessings, and will save them from

the wounds and vexations which the love of the world too frequently inflicts.

The repetition of these thoughts, the frequent recollection of the shortness of life, may likewise become the subject of calm *delight*. Their days are numbered on earth, but they are *not* numbered in heaven. *There* no measure of duration is required. *There* no possibility of change is feared. *There* all is bright, and pure, and constant. *There* “the weary are indeed at rest.” *There* the flower bears no thorn, and its beauty has no tendency to fade. *There* is bliss without danger, and prosperity without pride. *There* is a society whose ranks death never thins, a family which never suffers from separation or from shame! *There* are the rivers of pleasure flowing at God’s right hand for evermore!

The contemplation of these bright and happy scenes will often impart a peace of mind unknown amidst the unholy agitations of the world. Death will often become a subject of actual exultation; and the soul, dilating all its better affections, will in some favoured moments be led to exclaim, “Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest.”

And if the fact of *divine teaching*, connected with these statements of the brevity of life, be

as we have seen, the fair subject of *gratitude* to those who have discovered the worth of heavenly wisdom, may it not become the ground of *encouragement* to those, who though still under the strong influence of worldly feelings, are yet anxious at length to apply their hearts unto wisdom?

Are we *at least interested* in the subject of religion? Do we feel that the joys or the sorrows of eternity are no idle topics of solicitude? Would we fain possess the quietness of mind which Christianity promises to the faithful servants of God? Are we growing painfully conscious of the imperfection of our religious knowledge, of the weakness of our best resolutions, and of the strength of the temptations which assail us? What ground of encouragement may we find in the fact and promise of this *divine teaching*!

Oh never let the paternal assurance die away upon our ears, “*If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.*” “*Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.*”

We have in these promises every thing to nourish hope and to justify exertion. Let us not be wanting to ourselves. Let us hasten to escape from the defilements of the world, and,

if needful, to meet with equanimity the ridicule of the ungodly; cheered by the recollection that manliness of character lies in the *fear of God*, and in the *pursuit of truth*. And let not the lulling invitations of *delay* be allowed any longer to beguile us. Time presses—life is uncertain—events come without warning—the sun is overcast at noon-day—a sudden whirlwind sweeps all before it. “*Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.*” “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.*” “*For the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.*”

SERMON XXI.

THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

2 PETER iii. 15.

“AND ACCOUNT THAT THE LONG-SUFFERING OF OUR LORD IS
SALVATION.”

It is the remark of the wise man, that “because sentence is not speedily executed against a sinful work, therefore the hearts of men are continually set in them to do evil.” Judgment lingers, and therefore men continue “to put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, good for evil, and evil for good.” The delay of God in awarding the final allotments of sin, has sometimes encouraged scepticism, and opened the lips of blasphemy. “Scoffers, walking after their own lusts,” observes St. Peter, “say, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world!” In answer to this profane sarcasm, the apostle compassionately replies, “For this they wil-

lingly are ignorant of, that by the word of the Lord the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water, and in the water, whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But beloved, be not ignorant that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but *is long-suffering* to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. Wherefore beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless: and *account that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation.*"

In farther elucidation of this subject, let us remark, I. THE FACT OF THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD; and II. ITS GENEROUS OBJECT.

I. Let us notice in the first place, THE FACT OF GOD'S LONG-SUFFERING.

How rarely has it happened, that punishment

from God has immediately followed crime. Instances indeed have occurred of miraculous interference on the part of God, in which the offender has instantly paid the forfeit of his iniquity. Herod was smitten on the very throne of his pride. Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the apostle's feet. But these instances are unusual. Sentence of condemnation is not speedily executed. The sun shines on the evil and on the good. The blessings of health and prosperity often accompany the sinner all through his course of contempt and rebellion : " these prosper in the world, neither are they brought into trouble as other men are." Year after year the sinner walks on his way, and no avenging arm sweeps him from the earth. He renews his provocations every day, and every day is spared. The patience of God appears inexhaustible. The scriptures supply abundant instances of this long-suffering. Take the case of the universal deluge, to which the apostle Peter has already referred. The inhabitants of the old world were sunk in the very depths of profaneness and sensuality. " The imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts were only evil continually." God determined to mark his righteous indignation against their ungodliness, by a tremendous visitation of his power. He proclaimed his intention to bring a deluge upon the earth, and to bury its nume-

rous inhabitants in a watery grave. Yet did he accompany this proclamation by several astonishing proofs of patience and long-suffering. He announced a period of one hundred and twenty years, during which "his spirit should strive with man." He gave to the world in the character of Noah, a preacher of righteousness, in order to warn and exhort. He directed Noah to construct an ark, as a place of refuge when the waters of the flood should swell around. Consider again his conduct towards the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah. His clemency spared them from year to year. His providence spared Lot, "that righteous soul," amongst them. His compassion listened to Abraham's intercession, and ten righteous men had proved their preservation. Consider again his dealings with the descendants of Israel. What are the records of their history, but announcements on the one hand of their rebellion, and of God's long-suffering on the other? How patiently did God "suffer their manners;" how slow was his wrath to arise; how reluctant was his hand to descend in judgment! "Oh! that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!" "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have ga-

thered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" But we need not go to distant regions for proofs of this fact; we possess such facts each in his own bosom. "The wages of sin are death;" yet have each of us sinned, and our lives are still spared to us. We have often set at nought the divine authority; we have often insulted his majesty; we have often stifled the voice of conscience, which spoke for God within our hearts: we have often scorned the counsels of his word, and preferred the opinions of men as fallible as ourselves, or we have set up the conceits of our own mind as a better standard of right, than the revealed records of God. We have neither loved God with all our hearts, neither our neighbour as ourselves: and yet his hand is still averted; his wrath has not overwhelmed us. His final judgment lingers, and the thunders of perdition yet roll at a distance from us. Oh, marvellous patience and long-suffering! Why are we not consumed? Why reap we not the full harvest of our polluted ways?

II. The GENEROUS OBJECT connected with this fact is stated in the text. The long-suffering of God is *salvation*, or as the apostle had before remarked, "*God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that*

any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Hence we may remark in the first place, that God bears with transgressors, not because he is *ignorant of their actions*.

In earthly governments, many a crime escapes punishment because it escapes detection. Human vigilance is limited, and therefore human knowledge is imperfect. Darkness and solitude are both safeguards to the wicked. But it is otherwise with God: "the darkness is no darkness with thee;" "there is no place where the wicked can flee to hide themselves," "for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro in the earth, beholding the evil and the good." Not only are gross and palpable violations of his law visible to God; but the thoughts and intents of the heart are open to his inspection. There is no deficiency of knowledge with God, and thus detection is certain. The sinner stands exposed before him, with every circumstance both of motive, of time, of place, and of aggravation!

Again, God bears with transgressors *not* because he is *indifferent to their actions*. In human governments, especially despotic, many crimes escape punishment, because a laxity of principle prevails in the minds of the rulers as well as in the minds of the people; or because the law may take no cognizance of immorality.

There is a terrible indifference to the moral quality of actions often visible in the world; and therefore, vice walks abroad, and even without shame; but in the mind of God no indifference of this kind prevails. "He is a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" he is "the holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty;" he is a jealous God, and his law which takes cognizance of the heart, is like himself "holy, and just, and good;" and its tremendous sanction ever stands by to protect it, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them."

Once more, God bears with sinners, *not* because he *wants the power* "to avenge him of his adversaries."

In human administrations, the arm of the law has sometimes been found too weak to arrest the criminal for punishment. "Hand joined to hand," has given safety to crime, and overwhelmed order and law in confusion and blood. But in the divine administration it is otherwise: though hand join with hand, though one age of men should add its strength to that of another, to carry on the same impious war against the majesty of heaven, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished. Jehovah asks, "Canst thou thunder with a voice like mine?"

Can thine heart endure, and thine hands be strong when I arise to do this?" The destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed." "And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." If then delay takes place in the vindication of God's insulted authority, it is *not* either because God is *ignorant* of crime, or because he is *indifferent* to crime, or because he *wants the power to punish it*; but it is because his name and his nature is Love. It is because his bowels yearn over us, even as a father longeth after a rebellious child! It is because He would give us time and space for repentance! It is finally, that his patience and long-suffering may prove our eternal salvation!

But let us contemplate more minutely the reasons for the delay in punishment, as recorded in the text.

Now we may observe in the first place, that it is the actual *design of God by this long suffering to bring men to salvation*. "If he should strive with men, the spirit should fail before him, and the souls that he hath made!" "But," says the Scriptures, "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." It is his special design to mag-

nify his mercy, and to evince his love in the recovery of the lost to his favour and felicity. He has given his Son to be their Restorer and Saviour, and he will magnify his munificence by his mediation. This is the blessed record : “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” In pursuance of this design Jesus Christ became incarnate, preached in the world, expostulated with men, died as a vicarious sacrifice, and rose again from the dead, and ascended up on high, “ to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to his people, and the remission of their sins.” And now has the proclamation of mercy gone forth ; now is his gospel sounded in the ears of men, and now are the effects of that mercy visible in the conversion of many a sinner, and in the saving many a soul from endless death. Why then is condemnation deferred ?” why do all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world ? Is it for any other reason than that God designs to heal and to save ? Is it for any other purpose than that God’s elect may be gathered in from the four winds of heaven ? Is it for any other purpose than

that they may come from the east and from the west; from the north and from the south, to sit down with saved Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God? What is all this prolongation of life, this repetition of kindness, this process of instruction, these invitations to repentance and faith; what, but that “God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live?”

But again, the *tendency* of this long-suffering, as well as God’s design, is to salvation.

“Despisest thou,” says the apostle, “the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

Here the apostle states the *tendency*, the *scope of goodness*, to be *repentance*. And is not this assertion practically true? Is not forbearance towards an enemy calculated to awaken regret? Are not undeserved pity, and tender compassion, calculated to melt down the ruggedness of the heart, to excite sensibility, to produce reflection, to urge to duty and to long-neglected obedience?

Is not this the highest motive to a return to filial submission? As if the heart should suggest, “My heavenly Father has had much patience with me; I have insulted him again and again; but he has returned to me nothing but love. His

character is venerable; but oh, his compassion is unsearchable! Shall I *continue* to sin against such goodness—to trifle with such mercy—to spurn such offers of liberality and munificence? Shall the grace of God be proclaimed in my ear?—Shall the blood of Christ be shed as in my very sight? Shall the spirit of grace and supplication knock as for admission into my heart—shall year recurring after year, present all this loving-kindness, and present it in vain? Shall not such goodness lead me to deep, bitter, and abiding repentance? Shall I not arise, conciliated by such parental clemency, and as a “prisoner of Hope,” fly to the “city of refuge,” provided for offenders such as I? Is not this the just tendency of long-suffering? Is it not an instrument, a condition of mind, a quality admirably calculated to excite in the soul contrite and affecting emotions towards God?

But once again, the *actual effect of this long-suffering on the part of God is salvation.*

Has all this goodness yielded no harvest of safety and happiness to the lost and miserable? Are there no souls lodged safe in the bosom of Christ, no children dwelling peacefully in their heavenly home, and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? How reached they those blessed abodes? How learned they those anthems of joy? Was it not even because the long-suffering of God was salvation? Was it not because

the tenderness of God led them to repentance? Did he not design to bless them?—did he not give them as a spiritual seed to Christ? Did not his sovereign love and grace say unto them “live;” and they made use of the day of mercy; and they **threw down** their arms of rebellion, and they hastened back to **their** indulgent Lord? Oh! in his love and in his pity he bore with them, and they became sensible of his love, and they yielded up themselves to its influence! They exclaimed, “We love him, because he first loved us!” Now they washed away their sins in the blood of the Lamb, they gladly put on by faith the beauteous robe of the Redeemer’s righteousness; and they gave him praise, and they glorified his name. They felt the constraining power of his goodness, and no one said, “*he lived to himself, and no one said, he died to himself; but both living they lived to the Lord, and dying they died to the Lord; and so both living and dying, they were the Lord’s.*”

And thus through the mighty efficacy of faith and love, they were obedient unto death, and obtained the crown of life; and henceforth they are blessed for ever; they dwell with God, and he hath wiped away all their tears, and their sins he hath buried in the depths of the sea!

Thus the grace of God wrought their salvation;

and thus his patience and forbearance were exercised towards them. Thus they were made “willing in a day of power,” and “accounted the long-suffering of God to be indeed salvation.”

But are there none yet militant on earth, whose history can attest the same truth? Are there none here present, who, reviewing the period of life, and tracing through that period the dealings of God, can tell how, through much long-suffering, he hath brought them to contrition and newness of life? Are there none over whom God waited long to be gracious? None who can testify that God’s goodness reacheth unto the heavens, and his faithfulness unto the clouds? Are there none who contested long against mercy, and judgment, and admonition, and invitation; and yet God gave them not up, but still followed them to do them good? And at length, when they came humbled to his arms, he “received them graciously and loved them freely?” Like the strayed sheep, they wandered long and far; but the good shepherd, unwearied and compassionate, sought even till he found them, and brought them back on his shoulders rejoicing! Oh! hath not the long-suffering of God been to us salvation? Might he not long since have rejected and destroyed us? Might he not, in

his righteousness and justice, have sworn that we should never "enter into his rest?" Might he not, without the slightest imputation, either on his goodness or his holiness, have consigned us over to the eternal expiation of our sins? But in opposition to all our deserts, and it may be, beyond our unbelieving fears, he hath pitied, and sanctified, and saved us? He hath unfolded to our astonished souls, all the fulness of his grace, and all the munificence of his love. "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." He hath taught us, that his ways are indeed "not as our ways, neither his thoughts as our thoughts!" Oh! let us meet this goodness with gratitude, and this love with obedience! Let us acknowledge the freeness of his grace, and give him all the glory of our salvation! Let us stand before him, as altogether worthless in ourselves, and altogether complete in him! Let us live a life of faith in his name, and henceforth "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord!" Under every conviction of sin, let us go to the healing fountain of his blood, and trust to his righteousness! Under every anxiety of sorrow and privation, let us cast our care on him, for nothing shall separate us from his love!

We are his by the bonds of an “everlasting covenant;” and all our “fresh springs” shall be found in him, from henceforth even for ever!

But, in conclusion, we must observe, that though the long-suffering of God be thus incontestibly *designed* to be salvation, yet “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” There is a *period* to the divine patience, and fearful is the temerity of him who should wish to ascertain the limit by his own experience! The decisions of inexorable justice will shortly supersede the efforts of abused mercy. Sin will surely find out the offender, if not here in the sorrows of penitence, yet hereafter in the anguish of eternal remorse! Ere then such remorse fasten upon us its terrible fangs; ere the flame that is never quenched assail the astonished soul; be it ours to repent and believe the gospel! The day of grace is yet our own; but the shadows of night are near! Beneath the starless sky of that fearful night can no man work! Be it then ours now to pray, to struggle, to conquer, to obey; to quit the world and its shackles, and to seek peace in the bosom of Christ! All other distinctions, and honours, and joys, are withering away. Be it then ours now to meditate on the wrecks of time, and to contrast them with

the enduring felicities of eternity! Be it ours to think on the long-suffering of God, and to account it salvation; to build our final resting-place on a rock of adamant; and when the floods descend, and the winds beat, it shall not fall!

SERMON XXII.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

LUKE xi. 13.

‘IF YE BEING EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS UNTO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE SHALL YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER GIVE HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO THEM THAT ASK HIM?’

THE obstacles which lie in the path to genuine felicity are numerous and alarming. The images indeed under which the scriptures delineate one slow and painful progress to ultimate security, are of the most striking and *urgent* character. We are commanded “to fight the *good fight* of faith,” “to *grasp hold* of eternal life,” “to run the *race* so as to win the prize,” “to *work out* our salvation with fear and trembling,” “to make our calling and election *sure*,” because “the kingdom of heaven *suffereth violence*, and the *violent* take it by *force*.”

The sources of these difficulties lie partly in the corrupt state of our own hearts; partly in the corrupt and polluting state of the world around us; and partly in the subtle malice and

power of our spiritual enemies—enemies, whose influence is the more appalling, because exerted in modes concealed from our direct observation. Under such circumstances, it were perhaps the office of reason itself to sink us into despair, could we summon to our aid the limited resources alone of our own minds. But blessed be God, if our temptations be great, our powers of resistance are yet greater; and though the combined hosts of earth and hell oppose our progress to purity and happiness, we are privileged to call to our support the efforts of an arm, before whose mighty energy these foes shall flee, even as the chaff before the winter's storm. The renewal of holy intercourse with a higher world is among the blessings purchased for man, by the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The influences "of the spirit of promise," now largely and liberally descend upon the human heart: the healing waters of life now flow from the sanctuary, to refresh the thirsty soul, and to revive the strength of the contrite. The virtue of the Eternal Spirit goes forth to quicken the dead, and to uphold the living; to render effectual the atonement of the cross, and ultimately to present unto God a holy and peculiar people, bright and numerous as the dew-drops of the morning. Hence it has become *possible* to struggle successfully with evil; to hold on our

course through the rugged paths of life, and to reach the everlasting gates of Zion, as those, who “are even more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us.” The eternal God is himself our Saviour—the Spirit is our guide and comforter—the Scriptures of truth, our infallible directory—and heaven is prepared for us under the bond of an unbroken covenant, as our final and secure abode. “The path of the just is thus as the shining light, which *shineth more and more* unto the perfect day.”

How deeply important then to human happiness is the doctrine of a divine influence over the heart! We do not here refer to the indefinite concession, that God *may* help the honest efforts of virtue; but we refer to the fact of the converting and purifying agency of the Holy Ghost upon the sinful and depraved affections. “Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “For the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

I. THE NECESSITY FOR THIS DIVINE INFLUENCE becomes very evident to him who has ascertained by much self-communion the crippled, and defiled, and disordered condition of the human mind. We are exposed to *two* terrific evils: *we have violated the laws of God*, and through that violation we are become *permanently disaffected to the divine government*. But

as the character of God is holy, the ways of his providence holy, and his happiness holy; *we cannot regain happiness, except we regain conformity to his character, while we receive remission of the penalties we have incurred.* Now Christianity comprises a train of means amply calculated to effect this great change in our condition. To the penalties incurred, it applies the doctrine of *propitiation by the cross*: to the renewal of the affections, it applies the doctrine of *divine influence*. And this change in the moral propensities is as *reasonable* as it is *essential* to our felicity. Let us offer a brief and familiar illustration: A wayward and rebellious child is exiled from his father's house; equally through the displeasure of his father, as through the righteous regulations of his family: the child, smitten by remorse and sorrow, seeks again the shelter which he had quitted, and the love which he had forfeited. His offences are forgiven, and he is restored to parental affection. Say now, whether his *approval* of the *moral habits* of his father's house be not as essential to his restored happiness, as the removal of his father's displeasure? Would the mere recovery of the rights of inheritance and of sonship yield enjoyment to him, if the jarring elements of pride and passion at work within his bosom, perpetually resisted the hallowed tempers and holy practices prevalent in his father's house?

And if it be true that *we* are exiled through iniquity from the Paradise of God ; if *we* are under the dominion of evil, is it possible in the nature of things that we can be restored to happiness except through a change in the moral condition and habits of our minds ? Could the very happiness of heaven be valued, except by those whose affections coalesce with the purity and sacredness of those celestial regions ? The lovely qualities of piety are discerned by the pious alone. Can *we* then enjoy the true felicity of God's children, except we be made like them through the influence of the Spirit of God ? We may live mingled amongst them during the few fleeting years of this earthly existence ; but we are hastening to a day of dreadful and final separation—a day when the chaff will be scattered to the flame ; and the wheat alone be laid up in the garner. “ For these shall go away into everlasting fire, but the righteous into life eternal.”

II. BUT LET US GUARD THIS DOCTRINE FROM ITS ABUSE. Let it not be said, that such declarations as these, open the door to enthusiasm ; that a man who forces upon himself the notion, that under peril of perdition he must become the subject of this “ divine inspiration,” will be shortly hurried into every species of absurdity, while he will sanction his folly beneath the sacred claim to a heaven-

taught judgment. The view we desire to give of this doctrine, stands perfectly clear of any such destructive inference. We affirm not, that it is the office of the great Comforter to impart any knowledge additional to that which lies recorded on the page of the existing revelation; or to excite a single emotion; to enjoin a single precept; or to stimulate by a single promise, which is not already found among those infallible testimonies of truth. The scriptures, as they now stand, comprise the whole will of God, with reference to the salvation and felicity of mankind. The day of miraculous teaching is no longer required. The canon of truth is complete. It is to *the voice of these scriptures* that the Spirit of God now directs our attention; and if any emotion, any impulse, any moral sentiment, be not in fair and candid accordance with that written word, it is not the result of a divine influence. "To the law and to the testimony," is the eternal reference made by the Spirit, as to the only infallible criterion of right and wrong. The benighted wanderer through this dark world beholds the volume of revelation, as the single beacon which sheds light across the wild, and which directs his path to the distant regions of imperishable felicity. We affirm therefore, that we expect the mighty agency of the Spirit of God, in no

respect to supersede the use of the Scriptures, but rather to *draw our attention to its pages* ; not to inflate us with the conceit of personal infallibility, but to give us the docility of children ; that we may sit reverently at the Saviour's feet, and accept his instructions as "all our salvation and desire." Our spiritual ignorance has been in great measure the result of our *disaffection* to godliness ; we have no *taste* for truth ; we rest under the most awful *insensibility* to the whole claims of God, and to all the interests of our eternity. Yet are those claims and those interests plainly delineated in the sacred canon. We want no *additional* record. But we too fatally want *the disposition to hear and to receive* this actual counsel of God. We need to rectify the baleful persuasion under which we live, that the service and friendship of the world are more productive of enjoyment, than the favour and intercourse of God. *Here* is the necessity for the work of the Holy Ghost. It is to arrest *attention* to God's decisions ; it is to shed light upon the intellect and the heart, as to their *connection with future joys and sorrows* ; it is to excite moral susceptibility ; to open to the hitherto degraded imagination, the treasures of purity and of truth ; it is, in brief, to allure back the alienated sensibilities of the heart to God, by making him the high object of attraction and of love. The objects of time and

sense have been hitherto paramount in our habitual estimate of good. We have rejected eternity from our thoughts, except, as an indistinct object, far too distant and unknown to excite solicitude. Hence, the momentous work of the Holy Ghost, is required to awaken the soul to its nobler interests; to give the *taste* which can feed upon immortal truth; to kindle within the breast the flame of hallowed affections; to secure its anxieties for God and eternity; and to chain down its eager attention to the *actual* records of revelation. Hence, it is not the spirit of miraculous inspiration given to apostles and prophets, to which we refer. We refer rather to the spirit of conversion which can alone minister to our moral diseases, and rectify the depravity of our hearts. We affirm, under the warrant both of scripture and of fact, the necessity for this celestial agency, because deaf is man to every threatening, and callous to every generous entreaty on God's part; until, in addition to the recorded documents of grace, be given that "still, small voice," that hidden eloquence of truth, which finds access within the hidden chambers of his heart, and constrains him to hear, to believe, to relent, to love, and to obey!

And these assertions, we repeat, are surely in full accordance with every statement of Christianity. "Now we have received," says

the apostle Paul, addressing generally the Corinthian church, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might *know* the things which are freely given to us of God." "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*." He therefore adds, "Ye are God's husbandry. I have planted, and Apollos watered, but *God gave the increase*." It was in reference to this spiritual illumination, that the royal Psalmist prayed, "*Open* thou mine eyes, that *I may see* wondrous things in thy law." It was in reference to this heavenly influence upon the soul, that the Son of God himself affirmed, "No man cometh unto me, except the Father draw him." "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

These, and similar expressions, place it beyond a question, whether religion, in its power over the heart, be or be not the fruit of mere human sagacity. It is a prevalent notion, that to be religious, to fulfil the requisite duties of piety, is an effort within the ordinary range of human ability. But such an opinion arises from an ignorance of the *internal* and essential

character of religion. It is sufficiently easy to execute with the lips the ceremonials of Christianity. But who, by his own skill, ever offered unto God “the sacrifice of a broken, and contrite,” and loving “heart,” which is yet the only sacrifice “which he will not despise?” Religion is something very different from the ritual of devotion; from mere good-nature; from the mere recognition of the claims of courtesy between man and man. We may live in the esteem, or in the affections, of our fellow-creatures; but we may be wholly destitute of the friendship of God. We may despise practical godliness. We may live without any humble and affectionate communion with our Saviour. The whole dispensation of grace may be concealed from our view. We may be living without one single distinct reference to the nature of the felicity of another world. In this state of absolute alienation from God, we may yet be accounted religious, and, on those very grounds, be elevated in our own esteem! So dense, yet plausible, are the delusions which sin weaves around the human heart! The *fair* interpretation of Christianity is perhaps, by such persons, accounted a libel upon human nature! But are we not sinners, thus *absolutely needing* higher affections, and the renovation of our whole spiritual character? Is not the fact too palpable to be put down by

sophistry or scorn? Why do we pine in sorrow; why are we scourged by passion; or why do we moulder in the grave, if we be not sinners? And why did the blood of Christ stream from the cross, but to make atonement for this sin? And oh what folly—nay insanity—to deny the *import* of facts which *themselves* cannot be denied, when the wondrous *explanation* would convey to him who should receive it, more than a remedy for all his anguish and his guilt! But to become *happy*, we must become *humble*. We must submit to the discipline and instruction of God. We must ascribe to God the glory and the instrumentality of our peace and salvation. We must welcome the celestial light of the Spirit for our souls, as we do the light of the sun for our bodies, as a *gift conferred*, and not as a *right demanded*. We revert then again to the proposition, “that except a man be born again of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” It is *not* sufficient to be amiable and just to the ordinary claims of society, or to recognise the external memorials of Christianity. It is absolutely necessary “to be renewed after the image of God;” to have internal communion with Christ; to live a life of faith and of inward devotion; to cling around the promises of the gospel; and, with reference to *the state of our affections*, to “be pilgrims and strangers

upon earth, in *active pursuit* after a purer and happier land !

III. If then the spiritual conversion of the heart to God be thus essential to salvation, it becomes a question of the deepest moment, **IS GOD WILLING TO IMPART THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT ?** Is there any limitation in the promise to bestow it ? May the outcast, and the guilty, and the polluted supplicate this aid with an unrestricted prospect of success ? Is it possible that the heart, once the abode of every earthly and sordid affection, should become “ the habitation of God through the Spirit ? ” To these important queries the text affords an unequivocal reply. Let the children of sorrow and of sin listen ; let the victims of passion or of pride listen to the encouraging accents of the Son of God, “ If ye *being evil* know how to give *good gifts* unto your children, how *much more* shall your *heavenly Father* give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” As if he had said, “ If you who are fallen and degraded in your moral sentiments are yet more or less true to the natural instincts with which you are endowed ; if as parents your hearts own the relation of tender dependance between you and your children ; if your hearts dilate with compassion and sympathy, and you refuse to crush the expectations which the conviction of such dependance excites in the bosoms of *your*

children; shall it be imagined that your *heavenly Father* can be less warm to the interests of *his* children? Is it conceivable, that *he* can be deaf to your solicitations when you cry unto him beneath a sense of weakness, and of the most absolute dependance upon his mercy and strength? Is he not the fountain of your life? Is he not the original well-spring of every beautiful and tender feeling? Has not natural affection its origin in him? Are not parental emotions derived from *his* sensibility to kindness? Is there one generous, one fond sensation which has not owed its birth to his will? If then in this world of oppression, selfishness, and disorder, the anxieties of filial sorrow ever make an effectual appeal to a parent's heart; can the result of such an appeal be less efficient when the harassed and tempted child of God makes supplication to "the *Father* of all his mercies," and to the "God of all his consolation?" "*Much more* shall HE not give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Shall not HE evince a sympathy, and exert a power even *beyond* the entreaties and expectations of those who repose the burden of their wants upon his inexhaustible sufficiency?

● Oh how lamentably ignorant are we of the true character of God! How fatally disposed are we to break away from the presence of him who generously unites the will

and the might to succour us, even to the extremest of our wants? The glowing tokens of his bounty beam upon us on every side. Do we gaze with exhilarating emotion upon the sun which hourly refreshes us, and which kindles into beauty, and melody, and sweetness, the brightening vallies that surround us? Is it not he that “makes this sun to shine upon the evil and the good?” Do we refer to the soft and gladdening sensations which cheer and embellish the rugged paths of social life? Is it not HE who has gifted us with these charities, and who has directed us through their instrumentality to imitate the very movements of his own beneficence? But as if these proofs, rich and varied as they are, still left almost untouched the vast subject of his liberality, HE carries us to the history of the cross, and there displays to us a love which human conceptions fail to reach! “God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” He withheld not that only son from shame, and torture, and death; and shall “he not with him *freely* give us all things?” This mighty offering, this sacrifice of woe speaks to the deepest sympathies of our nature. It is a proclamation of pity and of grace which may well arrest the rebel heart, and turn back to God the tide of all its once alienated affec-

tions! Oh how infatuated is the coldness and reluctance which we display to such a benefactor! He concentrates in his high attributes all that is lovely in creative power, all that is holy in truth, and all that is generous in love; all that glows and refreshes in the *natural*, and all that soothes and attracts in the *spiritual* world! Well might the afflicted patriarch exclaim, "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace!" Can any exhibition of moral and intellectual beauty be more calculated to open all the susceptibilities of the heart? Can any delineation of character be more completely calculated to excite confidence, and to justify prayer? Ought one solitary shadow of doubt to overcloud his mind who comes humbled and afflicted, to the mercy-seat of such a God? Is the grace, the compassion of such a Being placed *beyond* the reach of the most destitute and the depraved? Will the genial influences, issuing from such a fountain, be slow to descend upon the thirsty soul which cries in sincerity for relief? Rather how effectual will prove at length that petition of the guilty and the forlorn, which supplicates by no less a memorial of goodness, than the agony and death of Jesus Christ! Rather how acceptable will be that confidence which relies on the recorded promises of the good and comforting Spirit! Rather how productive will be the upward aspirations of that heart which

would daily and hourly escape from the harsh and impure shackles of the world, and regain its asylum in the bosom and affections of God ! Oh, “ If ye **being** evil know how to give good gifts **unto** your children, *how much more* shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” “ Hitherto have ye asked little in my name ; *ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*”

SERMON XXIII.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

LUKE xxiv. 50—53.

“AND HE LED THEM OUT AS FAR AS TO BETHANY, AND HE LIFTED UP HIS HANDS AND BLESSED THEM. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHILE HE BLESSED THEM, HE WAS PARTED FROM THEM, AND CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN. AND THEY WORSHIPPED HIM, AND RETURNED TO JERUSALEM WITH GREAT JOY, AND WERE CONTINUALLY IN THE TEMPLE, PRAISING AND BLESSING GOD. AMEN.”

THE whole history of Jesus Christ is productive of deep and afflicting, yet joyful interest to a Christian mind. On all occasions, he more or less exhibits the powers of God, or the sympathies of man. He lays bare the human heart, and discovers all its degradation; yet this not in scorn, but in compassion. He humbles but to exalt; he carries conviction of guilt to the soul, to prepare it, not for the sentence of indignation, but for the accents of high and generous invitation. Each step of his progress through the world, becomes more and more attractive. He arrests attention by every lesson

of instruction, and by every action of munificence. His life is one incessant effort to awaken those around him to the contemplation of their true felicity. He dies amidst the manifestations of this unfatigued anxiety to render others happy. We follow him to the tomb with breathless interest. He revives, to force on us again, the recognition of the same benevolence. He has lost no portion of his tenderness in the solitude of the grave. The *first* reference he makes is still to *human disquietude*. "Peace be unto you," identifies a compassion which the dark and troubled waters of national ingratitude had failed to quench. He will soon take flight to the serenity of his Father's house, but he remembers the struggles to which his disciples will still be exposed. He leaves with them his last, momentous blessing. "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; and they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God."

In farther elucidation of this passage of Scripture, let us remark,

I. THE SCENE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S LAST MOMENTS IN THE WORLD.

"He led them out as far as to Bethany."

The name of Bethany recalls to our thoughts many affecting circumstances in the life of Christ. It recalls more especially the pious and affectionate family, in whose society he had been accustomed to pass many of his secluded hours. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." To choose Bethany as the final scene of his earthly pilgrimage, was surely to consecrate the memory of the calm and holy intercourse which he had there enjoyed, when shut out from the turmoil of public scorn, and from the menace of national violence. To choose this spot as the place from which he would ascend to a *higher* world, was to hallow the better recollections of *this*, was to shed a sacredness over that fond partiality of individual friendship, which marks him emphatically to have been "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." To linger amidst the shades of Bethany, was to evince the reality of his knowledge and participation of our weak and contracted nature; a nature which, bewildered in the expansion of general charity, seeks the narrow and tender boundary of domestic and individual attachment. To revisit such a scene, was to teach us in a manner the most attractive, that while Christianity can recognise a love, wide as the circle of human wants, and can point out a brotherhood "which no man can number, redeemed from every tongue, and kindred, and

people," it can yet recognise the necessity and the value of a more concentrated and limited affection! In a world where through suffering and sin, we find the operations both of intellect and of feeling to be contracted and thwarted—in a world where we groan beneath the pressure of a body of pain and of infirmity, and where we discover the very refinements of education and of piety, to prove the innocent, though powerful sources of estrangement and of repulsion—in such a world we want the more palpable and easy intercourse of a few kindred minds. We want a friendship which can stoop down to a distinct alliance with poverty, depression, and sorrow—we want the absence of numbers, the repose of solitude, the tranquillity of home—we want the tenderness upon which the multitude has no claim; the hidden asylum, where heart can sympathise with heart, where infirmity can find pity, and calamity respect. Over these wants, and over this affection Christ has thus thrown his protecting shield. The *wider* range of his benevolence who can doubt? A suffering world was in truth the object of his compassion; and it is the manifest property of Deity to enlarge the *surface* of its affection, without diminishing its *depth*. We can venerate the quality, but we cannot realise the practice. How then ought we to value the goodness which in assuming our *nature*, forgot

not our *infirmity* ; which in the hours of privacy and of solitude condensed for a *few* the love which he could feel for *all*—allowed even one selected associate “to lie in his bosom,” and thus to become to us at once the example and the consecration of fonder and more exclusive affection !

II. Let us refer to the LAST ACTION OF OUR SAVIOUR UPON EARTH. “ And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and *he lifted up his hands and blessed them.*” At his entrance into the world, the song of blessing had rolled down from heaven to earth. “ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill to men.” During his life and ministry, a series of beneficent acts had attested the nature and the universality of that “ goodwill ;” and his removal from the world shall bear testimony to the same high and gracious design ; his last action shall be one of tenderness and love. “ He lifted up his hands, and blessed them.” His work of degradation, atonement, and suffering was now accomplished. Every prophecy connected with his sojourn on earth was fulfilled ; and the ineffable glory which he had shared with God as Partner with him in his felicity and his eternity, now again invited him to repose. The situation of his disciples was, however, one of peril and of exposure. He had promised to them a kingdom and a crown of life ; but be-

tween them and this recompence formidable obstacles were interposed. The only path to this pre-eminent distinction was rugged and dangerous. It was a path begirt with snares, encircled by foes, watched and assailed by the malice and subtlety of hell, darkened by the contempt, and scorn, and violence of earth! Could he contemplate their approaching struggles without compassion and pain? Could he leave them without emotion, "as sheep amidst wolves?" They carried indeed a high commission, and they would be protected by a mighty arm; but they were still human, fallible, and sensitive to sorrow. Heralds of mercy to a captive and ruined world, "their feet would be beautiful upon the mountains;" but the pride and ignorance of the inhabitants would often scorn their message, and repay their kindly efforts with violence and disdain. Could he anticipate this destiny without, in some measure, sharing its bitterness? "He lifted up his arms, and he blessed ~~them~~ *through the conflict!*" "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth;" and "lo! I am with you always even to the end of the world." "Let not your hearts be troubled." "I will yet see you again, and your heart shall rejoice."

The extent of this benediction was however, not bounded by the wants and tribulation of the apostles; it embraced the struggles and the

sorrows of the Church in every succeeding age. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for those who shall believe on me through their word.” The assembled disciples were in fact the representatives of the faithful in every time and place. Did Jesus Christ then *record* his parting blessing? Oh! was it not that in after, as well as during elapsing ages, the sufferer might turn himself to “the strong-hold,” and repose his wearied heart upon the loving-kindness of his God?—unknown perhaps, or if known, despised of men, without a home or friend—he now marks these uplifted hands, and hears this effective blessing—

“Poor tho’ I am, despised, forgot,
Yet God, *my* God forgets me not :
And he is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead !”

Such was the intercession—such the benediction given to the disciples. Its import, its efficacy thus stretches along the line of years, even to the last sorrow of the last saint who shall walk the pathways of this wilderness “a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth.”

III. Let us notice thirdly, THE SEPARATION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM HIS DISCIPLES, AND HIS ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN. “And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven.” A

final termination was thus put to their earthly intercourse with Christ. They had enjoyed his friendship, and had listened to his sacred instructions during the brief period of his public ministry. Yet this period had been sufficiently long to rivet their attachment, and to excite the highest admiration for his character. But now the moment of his departure had arrived. To remain with them was no longer conducive to their welfare or to his own glory. Other and ulterior objects connected with his heavenly mission were now to be accomplished. "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart I will send him unto you. I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when He the Spirit of truth is come He shall guide you into all truth." The enlarged effusion of the Holy Spirit depended upon the consummation of the Redeemer's sacrifice. "The Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." But as the "peace made by the blood of his cross" was destined in the counsels of God "to reconcile *all things* in heaven and earth," the moment of extended blessing to mankind was now arrived. "The joy" which Jesus Christ had originally "placed before him," and for the attainment of which he had "endured the cross," was not simply the

filial joy of doing his Father's will, but the *generous* joy of imparting eternal life to unnumbered myriads of the human race. But to accomplish this object, it became him now to quit the world of his humiliation; to re-ascend to the right hand of power; to assume the sceptre of his spiritual dominion; and to unlock the flood-gates of these benignant and healing influences, which, through the eternal Comforter will ultimately renew the moral wilderness, and bring back the scenes of paradise to the earth!

According to the prophetic record, God has given to Christ "the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." In pursuance of this object, he will "pull down the strong holds of Satan," and rebuild in the purified bosom "the habitation of God through the Spirit." Not by external "power or might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will *draw* all men to me." To use the words of a living writer, "*The proclamation of free-pardon through the cross* was henceforth to become that weapon of ethereal temper which God has chosen out of the armoury of heaven, and which he has blessed and sanctified for the destruction of moral evil in the world." But the weapon is effectual only in the hands of the Spirit. This word of re-

conciliation is "that sword of the Spirit" by which every spiritual victory is to be achieved. Hence the separation of Christ from his disciples was a necessary and bright link in the chain of mercies which bound him to mankind. His endeared associates can, therefore, attach him no longer to earth. Their welfare and the welfare of innumerable sufferers hangs upon his *absence*. "It is expedient for you that I go away." His affection is disinterested, productive, constant. Therefore was he "parted from them, and a cloud received him out of their sight."

This is a world of distance, of exile, and of separation. But from our losses spring our gains; from our sorrows our joys; from our death our life. And this condition of events and of sensations is well calculated and kindly intended to exercise our faith; to try and augment our love; to call forth our patience, and to evince God's entire right over us. We are thus "saved by hope." "We walk by faith, not by sight," or we see at best "as through a glass darkly." The Saviour in whom we confide is lost to the outward eye; his accents fall no more upon the outward ear; yet is he invisibly united to our souls; yet has "he entered for us within the veil;" yet has he gladdened the inhabitants of heaven by his arrival as the "forerunner" of the millions

whom he "hath redeemed unto God by his blood!" The veil of mortality thus throws into momentary obscurity the eternal splendour of his throne. But he will soon lift up the barrier. He will return to realise, amidst the pomp of celestial attendants, the full execution of that generous and unforgotten record, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me, where I am, to behold my glory." Meantime he is not unknown, unhonoured, unbeloved. Rather, "whom having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." "Beloved now are we the sons of God." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

IV. It remains to notice, THE FEELINGS AND CONDUCT OF THE DISCIPLES, AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THEIR MASTER FROM THE WORLD. "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." A heavenly light now began to beam upon the minds of the apostles. The mysterious character of their divine master began to be developed. He was mightier than the grave. He had again ascended into heaven. The recollection of his "transfiguration" would

now recur. "His face had been glistening, and his raiment shining." If he were man, he was likewise "equal with God." "I and my Father are one." They now began to worship him as such. Their earthly love was transmuted and refined. As man, they clung with fond fidelity to the memorials of his love. As God, they yielded up to him their faculties in unlimited adoration and praise. Their minds were influenced by an awe blended with the intimacy of long and familiar friendship.— "Great was now the unfolded mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit; seen of angels; received up into glory." They now adored Christ, as "God over all for ever blessed." They now recollected his last solemn injunction to wait at Jerusalem until they should be endued with strength from on high; and they returned thither "with great joy." With what different emotions did they now retrace the scenes of sorrow and mortification which, but a few days before, Jerusalem had presented to their view! Their master was indeed parted from their sight, but the tomb was empty! Death was vanquished! The heavens had received the glorified form until "the time of the restitution of all things!" His name might be execrated of men, but it was embalmed in the approbation of God!

It were difficult to ascertain the precise views of the apostles at this moment. It were difficult to say, ~~with what~~ clearness of judgment, or with what emotion of heart they recognised the doctrine of atonement, the pacification of the cross, the grace, the freeness, the munificence of the gospel. It were difficult to say what degree of obscurity might yet hang over the actions of their Lord; or what was the amount of that divine teaching which the illumination of Pentecost was yet to impart. Such questions may admit of many replies: we enter not into the subject. Let it suffice to say, that they returned to Jerusalem with joy. The load which had weighed down their spirits, was removed. Jesus, their friend, and companion, and redeemer lived! He had promised to return again in glory to the world! He had fastened on their consciences, and their hearts, the wondrous charge to go to all nations; and in the midst of human sorrows and sins, to tell the history of his love, and to invite the weary to come to him for rest! He had engaged "to be with them always." He had promised to them "eternal life," even "mansions in his Father's house for ever." They were filled with joy. They were upheld and excited by the noblest and loftiest anticipations. They rejoiced in the recollection

of their Lord, with a hope that was surely "full of immortality;" a hope which in no respect could be deemed "credulous of joy," but which had received its existence from the facts which had passed, and which had been interpreted before their very senses! Under the influence of these emotions, they entered the temple. They would love to linger within its sacred courts. "They were continually there." The services of the temple consecrated to the praise of God, would well accord with the tone of solemn, yet grateful joy, with which their hearts were now penetrated. They would see, emphatically, "God's beauty in the sanctuary." Elevated above the low and sordid cares of this passing world, they would recognise in the temple, the august type and shadow of that yet higher dwelling-place to which their redeemer was exalted. *He* heard no longer the strife and the blasphemy of men. He met no longer the sorrows of poverty; the bitterness of scorn; the memorials of earthly defilement! And *their* lives bound up in his, they were permitted to expect a quick translation to the same eternal home of light, and purity, and joy! "They were thus continually in the temple, praising God." Oh what were the sacred and high contemplations of these first saints and followers of the Lamb, thus waiting in the holy

twilight of Christianity for the splendours of its meridian day! It were at least probable to imagine that Eternity was the theme of their meditation, and that the visions of heaven were, in part at least, their own! Did they anticipate a world as pure and peaceful as this is polluted and unquiet? Did they anticipate “a city whose foundations are perpetual,” “whose builder and maker is God?” A city, in which the temple in which they then stood, magnificent as its structure had long been deemed, would give place to a spiritual edifice, bright with the full effulgence of God? Did they anticipate a world, “which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof?” “And the nations of them that are *saved*, shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it; and there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and the lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him?” Did they anticipate these grand results of their Saviour’s sufferings; this accomplished bliss; this fulness of joy; these rivers of pleasure flowing for evermore? Did they behold in faith the millions of the redeemed; or hear the distant tones of that wondrous and accordant song, “Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth?”

But a far more momentous question demands of us its deep and affecting solution. Do *we* share these bright and happy expectations? Do we, to whom the *full* revelation of Christianity has been imparted, raise our views to that "eternity" which God our Saviour "inhabits?" Do we believe the only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens? And, under the healing influence of this faith, have we also, "in heart and mind, thither ascended; and do we with him there continually dwell?" Oh! touched and humiliated beneath the history of the cross, have we learned to despise and to overlook the struggles, sorrows, or emoluments of this fleeting world? Elevated by a union with Christ, are we nobly aspiring to the felicity and the perfection to which he is exalted? Having gone out from the land of shadows, as pilgrims to an everlasting home, are we resolved to turn back to vanity no more? Are we followers of the apostles, as they followed Christ? Are we expectants, consistently and practically, of the near approach of the Lord from heaven? Are our aching eyes directed to the bright signs of his kingdom? Are we longing to mingle with patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, whose feet tread no more the rugged paths of this lower world? Do our best affections hang around *their* lofty

and secure condition ; and while purifying ourselves as Christ is pure, do we now, in heart and aim, participate their lot, and with them walk

“ High in salvation and the climes of bliss ? ”

SERMON XXIV.

CONVICTION OF SIN.

JOHN xvi. 8—9.

“AND WHEN HE IS COME, HE WILL REPROVE THE WORLD OF
SIN . . . OF SIN, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME.”

THE moral effect produced upon those who heard the instructions of Christ, was extremely limited. Although it was admitted “that he spake with authority;” that “never man spake like this man;” yet the practical results of his ministry were fugitive and ineffectual. To those who have studied the sacred volume with humility, and who at the same time have watched the movements of their own hearts, a ready explanation of this fact will occur. They will recollect, that in a depraved mind, passion overpowers reason and argument; they will recollect, that irreligion rests far more on disaffection of heart, than on want of evidence; they will recollect, that although truth and moral courage in any religious teacher, may force a momentary attention, yet, that as the subjects on which he touches are ill-suited to

the gratification of worldly habits; such subjects will ultimately produce a very limited impression upon the hearers. We speak of a real, and productive, and spiritual impression. A mere *moral* teacher, who should found his lessons upon the dignity of virtue, upon the inherent resources of our nature, upon the adaptation of right precepts to the regulations of society—such a man will sometimes exert an almost magic influence over his followers; because he still leaves them in peaceful possession of all their self-esteem. But if a system of this delusive character should appear in the eyes of an evangelist to be little better than the effort to heal an external disorder, while the vital parts remain diseased—and if he should proceed to lay bare the corruptions of the soul, to demand the *affections* for God—to state the necessity for contrition, and for entire dependance on the grace of God for salvation; if he should go on to propagate a religion *internal* and unearthly—in this case, he will find the difficulties in his path to be many and afflictive. His eloquence may excite, but it will not *convert*. The tide of worldliness may for a moment ebb, but it will quickly flow again. In reference to the personal ministry of Christ, at one period we are told; “the poor heard him gladly,” but how quickly were they induced to join in the infuriate shout, “crucify him, crucify him!”

As long as they imagined it probable that he was the predicted Messiah, destined to break the iron yoke of their subjection to a foreign power; as long as they imagined his miracles to be the visible tokens of a divine commission, under which they would regain their lost, but not forgotten distinction among the nations, they heard him with respect, and they followed him with zeal. But when he continued to shun publicity and to covet solitude; when he unmasked the vain pretensions of the nation to piety, and called for purity, lowliness, and "poverty of spirit;" when he declared that to "obey is better than sacrifice," and that genuine religion consists in cordial *love* to God, immediately their respect and their zeal were exchanged for contempt and opposition.

But was this result unforeseen by Christ? Was this opposition of the world destructive of the expectations under which he exercised his hallowed ministry? By no means; he came into the world to be at once its victim and its friend. He came to suffer and to die, as well as to teach and to entreat. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Hence he will "taste of death," that he may become possessed of power to impart life. He will be "lifted up from the earth, that he may *draw* all men to him;" not by the attrac-

tion of arguments which had already *failed* in their influence, but through the medium and energy of that celestial "Comforter," who can stamp upon the heart impressions which actually *renew* its nature. Sin had interrupted the sacred intercourse between heaven and earth. The benignant operations of the eternal Spirit were suspended ; the heart deserted of its heavenly guest had become hard and impenetrable, " a heart of stone." But through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the channels of spiritual communication will be re-opened ; and as the result of that sacrifice, the influences of God, like the genial sun-beams will again descend upon the human soul. Beneath this quickening energy the frozen heart will unbind, and receive the glorious impress of truth and righteousness. The effects of a single address by an infirm *disciple*, will now prove more productive than the accumulated instructions of the divine *Master*. " When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will lead you into all truth." " It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you." " And when he is come, he will *reprove* the world of *sin*, because they *believe not on me*." *

The design and effective effort of Christ in the world was " to save that which was lost ;"

lost, that is, to purity and to happiness. Now as a *moral* deliverance requires a *moral impression* on the heart, the rescue of a sinner from the perils of his condition, can proceed alone from a *recovered rectitude of mind*. And as no disease of the mind can be healed but by an internal process, of which the individual must be conscious, if man be enabled to regain purity of heart, the change will be accompanied by a painful *perception* of his previous *defilement*. Hence the spirit of God will “reprove the world of *sin*,” and this with special aggravation; “because they believe not in Christ.”

We have here *two* subjects for our further contemplation :

I. THE CONVICTION OF GUILT IN THE SOUL, BY THE AGENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT; and,

II. THE PECULIAR CHARACTER OF THAT GUILT, IN REFERENCE TO UNBELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST.

I. THE CONVICTION OF SIN IN THE SOUL, is the first and most important work of the Holy Spirit. A sense of guilt we may probably deem natural to man; and the mission of the Spirit to effect this object, to be therefore unnecessary. We would by no means deny the existence of such a conviction in the human heart. There is a secret voice within which sometimes speaks in accents which chill us to the very soul. It would be difficult to find a

human being who could affirm, that he had never heard and never violated the dictates of his conscience. And yet it is nearly as difficult to find those who honestly follow up this admission, and who examine either into its import, or into its extent. We rather hasten to check and to destroy, if possible, any actual sensation of guilt. We hasten to counterpoise the scale which is sinking by throwing our *seeming* virtues into the opposite scale. On every side, we hear of goodness of heart, of dignity of character, of upright intentions. If we admit that we are sinners, we hope to hide the hideousness of our sin, by the circumstances which accompany its perpetration. "We intend no evil. We honour integrity and kindness in others. We have a fair name. Many love, many speak well of, us. Besides, God will surely regard the *general* character, and not the *particular* action." Thus we practically annihilate the whole evil, whose existence we concede. We are sinners, and yet we are upright. We break God's laws, and yet we have goodness of heart. The sense of sin which thus prevails in the world, is very ineffectual to the production of any real shame or abhorrence of it. At times, indeed, violent manifestations of an awakened conscience appear, which drive the soul to the very gates of death; and it almost chooses "strangling

rather than life." There are occasional clamours of conscience, which sophistry cannot deceive, nor pleasure lull to rest. The remorse of hell sometimes begins its fearful work, even on earth. The very tortures of the utterly condemned, have seemed, as it were, to break through the barriers of the grave, and to exhibit, even on this side of eternity, the terrific traces of mental desolation. But perhaps such visitations of conscience are unfrequent. A dull calm rather pervades the bosoms of ungodly men. But in those whom God mercifully prepares for the happiness of heaven, the Holy Ghost fails not to effect a momentous change in the estimate which they form of their spiritual condition. They "come to themselves." They say, in deep sincerity, "we have sinned before heaven, and before thee, and are no more worthy to be called thy children." They "smite upon their anguished breasts, and often exclaim, God be merciful to us sinners." The beams of heavenly truth shine within their hearts, and enable them to discern the evils which the darkness of irreligion had hitherto concealed from their view. They begin to comprehend something of the holiness of God, and of the unbending rigour of his laws. They perceive that, if by various inferior motives, they have been restrained from the practice of great crimes; yet that the

heart has been estranged from God ; that all spiritual allegiance and homage has been withheld from him ; that He has not been the source of their happiness, nor the ground of their confidence ; that they have rather scattered their affections among the lowest creatures of his bounty ; and have pursued an unshrinking system of mental idolatry. They have “ come short,” as the scriptures express it, “ of the glory of God.” They have been “ dead in trespasses and sins.” Or if they have possessed religious knowledge ; if they have been educated amidst the hallowed instructions of God’s word, they have but partially yielded to its high requirements. Their hearts have not been “ right with God.” To know, has not been to do his will. To listen to the history of heavenly things, has not been to dissolve away the enchantment of earthly things. Worldliness and sensuality have incessantly urged their claims ; and such claims have been too fatally admitted. God has urged his rights ; and such rights have been as fatally denied. The two great laws of the universe, which bind the spiritual creation to its God, and which unite one part of it to the other ; these they have deliberately and perpetually violated. They have neither “ loved *God* with all the heart,” nor “ their *neighbours* as themselves.” They now perceive this ; and the conviction of

sin has become at once decisive and permanent. The dream of their virtue and of their dignity has passed away; and the reality of their moral degradation has become apparent. They now compare themselves with the standard of God's law; they search the scriptures; they acquaint themselves with God; they pray for his grace; they feel abashed and awed before his purity; they know not in what adequate terms to express the guilt of their rebellion against him. They are overwhelmed by the discovery of their entire depravity, and are no longer disposed to restrain the bitter lamentation—"Woe is me, for I am undone." "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,; but now mine eye hath seen thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

This work of the Spirit is incessantly advancing in the world. It commenced its wider operations soon after the resurrection of Christ, and its effects have been most salutary to mankind. The divine "Comforter," according to prophetic intimation, descended to occupy the place of Christ in the church; and to fix his bright abode in the hearts of its true members. While he enables them to discern the vain and "evil" effort to "hew out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water," he leads them back, with perpetual gladness, to drink of the flowing "fountains of living waters." He

urges them alike by the arguments of reason, as by the sensations of weakness, to abandon their own scattered resources, and to fly as “prisoners of hope,” to that edifice of mercy, the gates of which stand open day and night; and from the walls of which are heard the accents of unceasing invitation—“*Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.*” “*I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.*” “*Look unto me, and be ye saved; for I am God, a just God and a Saviour, and beside me there is none other.*”

II. THE PECULIAR CHARACTER OF HUMAN GUILT, STANDS IN CONNECTION WITH THIS SYSTEM OF MERCY. The spirit of truth will convince men of sin, on this special ground, that *they believe not in Jesus Christ*. The aggravation of our guilt, the pungent quality of our iniquity, is derived from our rejection of Jesus Christ. It is at the cross of Christ that God permitted the full discovery of human ingratitude to take place. The sorrows of Christ have afforded evidence of guilt, sufficient to appal and to confound the world. Behold the Man! His enemies can find nothing to array against him. The charge dies upon the lips of the accuser. At length a solemn truth which every action ratified, is alleged against him as blasphemy; and he who spent his life in the instruction of the ignorant, and in the consolation of the unhappy; he who

dwelt amidst the poor, the sick, the helpless, and the dying; he who never exhibited one selfish feeling; who seemed to have lost all sensibility, but to the wretchedness of others; he is nailed to a cross, and expires amidst the execrations of those before whom all his virtues had been fully displayed! “*He saved others, himself he cannot save.*” Strange and cruel taunt! Oh, here is the tremendous proof of **human** depravity; here is the dark league of rebellion **against** God and truth! Here is the manifestation of that utter abandonment of godliness which lies charged upon our nature, and which evinces “the course of this world to be “*according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience.*”

The justice of these remarks, in reference to the unbelief of the Jews, and to *their* rejection of Christ will be readily admitted; but it will perhaps be asked, “How does the history of the cross furnish a similar proof of depravity in succeeding ages?” The answer to this question is not difficult. Such a charge, of course, attaches not to those who have never heard of the visit of Jesus Christ to the world. But in *whatever country* the light of revelation has penetrated, it has there *uniformly* rendered the most terrific evidence to human ingratitude. We grow up familiar with the great facts of

Christianity. We profess to credit the history of the evangelists. We follow the detail of our Redeemer's sufferings. We even periodically associate to commemorate them, and yet where are the sacred emotions which a knowledge of those facts ought to produce? Where is any adequate conviction of obligation under the incalculable amount of mercy manifested to us as sinners? A mercy attested by the agonies and infamy of Christ? Where is that gratitude which no vicissitude can impair? That allegiance which no allurement can bribe? Where is that love which ought to find its full expansion within the bosom, beneath the view of transactions so generous and so kind? These emotions exist not, and in their fatal *absence* lies the glowing evidence that the *Gentiles* of the *present* are, in very fact, the *Jews* of the *past* age; that where God is concerned there is in man neither shame, nor gratitude, nor love, nor justice! Never do our lips attest our belief in the truths of revelation; never do we in the solemn services of the sabbath confess Christ to be the Son of God, but we at the same moment record the charge against ourselves of deliberate baseness and of habitual contempt for all that is truly noble, and good, and great! Now it is the office of the Spirit to convince of sin *in this special reference to our practical rejection of Jesus Christ*. The con-

viction of sin is often, at first, indistinct, or it may refer to some specific act of violation of a known law; but as religious knowledge advances, as *the state of the heart* becomes the subject of scrutiny, the penitent is led in a peculiar manner to mark his depravity in this cruel neglect of his Saviour. He has professed to credit the history of his incarnation, of his disinterested mediation, of his sharp sufferings, and of their benevolent design; and yet he has never turned aside to *ponder* this affecting spectacle. He has never paused amidst the din and bustle of life, to investigate a mercy, a love, a compassion so strange and so intense! He has never fenced off a solemn hour in which to prostrate himself at his Saviour's feet, and urgently to implore a share in his effectual redemption! Rather, how noble a model of virtue has he entirely overlooked! How generous a friend has he neglected! How compassionate a God has he despised! Oh, how infinite his guilt, how hard his heart, how ignoble his spirit, how earthly his views! Thus it is the office of the Spirit to throw light upon this special sin. Up to this moment he has virtually rejected the covenant of peace. The interposition of Jesus Christ in his behalf, has been, in his mind, but as a ceremony or a dream!

But, in conclusion, let it be asked, what part

have *we ourselves* in this mystery of godliness? Are we convinced of sin? Are we sensible, that amidst all the decorations of society, the embellishments of science, the courtesies of friendship, we are yet exposed to this charge of deep ingratitude to our Saviour, and of foul rebellion against our God? Are we sensible, that judged by the law of truth we are indeed criminals: and that judged by the generous law of requital, we are base and thankless to the most liberal benefactor? And under these circumstances, have we sought the cleansing virtue of the great sacrifice? Have we entreated the effectual influences of the Spirit to renovate our hearts? Or are we still unmoved by all the statements of the scriptures? Alike unwarned by threatening, and untouched by invitation? Are we rejecting “the counsel of God against ourselves,” and are we foregoing all the blessed hopes of his pardoning grace? Whatever may be our theory, are we still in *practical* league with the ungodly, to dethrone the king of heaven, and to resist the dominion of truth and righteousness? Oh, ere the day of final doom approach; ere the decisions of inexorable justice separate the just from the unjust; ere the mansions of joy open to the one, and the prisons of despair unbar their gates to the other; ere the day of mercy ter-

minate, and the shadows of an unbroken night surround us, let us accept the gift of Christ, and seek eternal shelter beneath the atonement of his blood !

SERMON XXV.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

JOHN xvi. 8. 11.

“AND WHEN HE IS COME HE WILL REPROVE THE WORLD OF . . .
 RIGHTEOUSNESS; BECAUSE I GO TO MY FATHER, AND YE SEE
 ME NO MORE.”

IF it be the office of the Holy Spirit to produce in the heart a conviction of sin, it is equally his gracious office to disclose “a righteousness,” amidst whose effectual provisions, the entire removal of sin may be secured. Within the narrow range of earthly things evils are often discovered which admit of no remedy. The burden presses equally and constantly at every point. The sorrow is susceptible of no alleviation. It is the high characteristic of Christianity, that while it reveals to our contemplation terrific evils, from which our own wisdom and strength can never extricate us, it brings within our reach a celestial alliance which grapples successfully with the whole force of our calamity. Christianity records against us fearful allegations of crime which

the witness within our bosoms is compelled to ratify, but at the same moment it opens a history of mercy and of renovation, by which sin with all its bitter results may be pardoned and forgotten. If it convict us of depraved affections, and of utter inability to meet the solemn scrutiny of truth and justice, with equal evidence it displays before us, the adequacy of that atonement which the great "lawgiver" has himself provided and approved. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." "When he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall reprove or convince the world of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more." The concluding expression, "I go to my Father, and ye see me no more," affixes a direct limitation to the preceding term "righteousness," and connects it with the name and person of Christ. His righteousness was in fact questioned, his name was dishonoured, his claims were denied by those among whom he taught and lived. The vindication of *his righteousness* and of its *productive influence* upon mankind, he rests upon his resurrection from the dead, upon his victory over the grave, his return to the bosom of his Father, his re-ascension to those regions of ineffable felicity, which he inhabited from eternity.

I. Let us consider THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF

CHRIST IN VINDICATION OF HIS CHARACTER AS THE TRUE MESSIAH, and likewise,

II. AS THE GROUND OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD.

I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST IN VINDICATION OF HIS CHARACTER AS THE TRUE MESSIAH, is an object of the deepest importance. He died under the charge of imposture before men, and of blasphemy before God. He was able indeed, without the slightest movement of alarm, to encounter every insinuation, to stand the test of the keenest scrutiny. The blaze of day or the obscurity of night alike met HIM amidst the claims of duty and the toils of love. He fearlessly challenged his accusers to cast a single stain upon his character, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "The prince of this world," the great accuser of the good "cometh, and hath *nothing* in me." That such a character should ultimately gain no credit, should exert no effective influence upon others: that such a man, surrounded by multitudes who owed to his unwearied charity the faculties, the health, the joys of existence, should enter into the hour of his calamity almost as a solitary exile; that such a man should stand before a tribunal of justice, the very butt for scorn and slander, without one friend to shield his head from violence; that such a man should at length be consigned to

the most ignominious punishment, by which crime can receive its expiation, yields evidence of human depravity, to be contemplated with shuddering and dismay! “ Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the Son of man that thou *so* regardest Him!”

The dignity, the calmness, the moral courage, the generous charity which adorned his death; and the miraculous shock and darkness of nature which accompanied it; these extorted from the Roman centurion entrusted with the execution of the criminals, the memorable exclamation, “ Truly this was the Son of God.” But the Jewish rulers, and the indignant multitude treated with equal contempt the name of Christ, when dead as when alive. No relenting found a place in their malice. No compunction checked their cruelty. The solemnity of the grave, the coolness of reflection, the recollection of virtues, the exercise of which the grasp of death had now suspended; these produced no wish to render even a tardy justice to his memory! With cold and deliberate aim, though surrounded by supernatural attestations to his innocence, enmity and rage combined their efforts to bury his name from the recollections of mankind!

When carrying the load of disgrace in life, as we have already remarked, he rested the ultimate defence of his character upon the

event of his early resurrection from the dead. "Destroy the temple of this body, and I will rebuild it in three days." "The Spirit of truth shall convince the world of my righteousness, because I go unto my Father, and ye see me no more." As if he had said, "I am prepared to go down to the grave, loaded with shame and infamy. I am prepared to endure the charge of imposture and of blasphemy. I am prepared to undergo the lingering tortures of crucifixion, and the last agonies of death; such is the sympathy I feel with human wretchedness. But if I betray no eager haste, no oppressive anxiety to throw off the burden of slander under which I stand, it is not because my character is not dear to me; it is not because I am reckless of the voice which calumniates, or of the hand which pierces me. I design to rebut these charges; to vindicate my name; to establish my innocence. At present, however, the purposes of mercy; the exhibition of justice; the forlorn and wretched condition of man; the recovery of his heart to peace; the capacity of that diseased heart for knowledge and for bliss; these circumstances arrest my immediate efforts and invite me rather to the anguish of the cross. I obey the summons; I take the cup of "trembling, and shall calmly drink its dregs;" at length I shall bow my head to the stroke of death.

I shall repose in the grave; but I shall not remain its prisoner. If, like the mute tenants of the tomb, I moulder into dust; if no celestial agency restore me to the living, then let every allegation of my enemies be substantiated, and let my character be trampled on with scorn. But if I compel the grave to resign his prey, if, like the sun shining in its strength, I come back to cheer my afflicted disciples; if within their eager sight I re-ascend to the regions of felicity, then let slander hush her voice, then let my memory be dear to my friends, and my *righteousness be clear* as the noon-day."

This actual vindication of his character, Jesus Christ accomplished. "The keepers of his sepulchre became as dead men;" the earth rocked, and the gates of the grave opened. He came forth "the bright and morning star" of hope and joy, to his disciples. He satisfied every doubt as to his resurrection. "He opened their understandings." He explained difficulties. He led them to Bethany. He blessed them with uplifted hands. He ascended beyond the clamours of earth, and sat down "at the right hand of the majesty of God." And while his foes have been scattered to the four winds of heaven, his name has survived the shock of events, and the lapse of years. His name is still as the fragrant "oint-

ment poured forth." His remembrance still cheers the hearts, and sustains the hopes of the guilty and the sad. "They know in whom they have believed." As successive centuries roll away, successive sufferers still rest the burden of their fears upon his righteousness and strength!

II. We have yet to consider THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE GROUND OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. "If Christ be not risen from the dead," declares St. Paul to the Corinthians, "ye are yet in your sins." Then "also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." "But now," he triumphantly adds, "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

It appears from the scriptures, that when God created Adam, he constituted him the head or representative of the human race. The destiny of the offspring was in the custody of the parent. He could not "abide in honour" as a *solitary* servant of God; neither could he forfeit his allegiance as a *solitary* rebel. His fall would degrade his children. The casting away his own happiness would involve the misery of his whole race. This connection of circumstances and of character, seems to belong alike to the general framework of society, and

to the laws of the natural world. Amidst many *shades* of character, the same general propensities belong to the offspring which have previously belonged to the parent. The young of the tyger never possessed the qualities of the lamb. During the first playful days of its existence it may manifest harmlessness; but as age matures its strength it thirsts for blood equally with the race from which it springs. In the history of *human* society, the dignity of the father descends to the son. The attainder of the parent involves the degradation of the child. No event, or character, or thing, seems to stand alone. Every creature is a link in a vast chain of existence. Every event is a link in a similar chain of Providence. Now the history of redemption by Christ Jesus reveals the same kind of connection. Jesus Christ is actually designated “the second Adam,” and “as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” “For as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men, to justification of life.” “For as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous;” “that as sin hath reigned unto death, so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Under

these and similar expressions, Jesus Christ is presented to our faith as the federal head of those who are saved, precisely as Adam was the representative of those who are lost. Christ has rendered a spotless obedience to all the requirements of the moral law. “He has fulfilled all righteousness.” He became submissive even to death, and this the appalling death of the cross. This suffering he endured, and this righteousness he completed, that he might at once become an atonement for our transgression, and establish a perpetual claim to felicity on our behalf. He is thus our representative in death and in life. We merit death, and Jesus dies. He merits eternal joy, and we partake it with him. “Because I live, ye shall live also.” “I am the life.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” The ground of our acceptance, the condition of our pardon, the allotment of our felicity is thus connected with the atonement and obedience of Jesus Christ. To this connection, to this covenant, God the lawgiver and the judge is himself a party. The plan of pacification is his *own*, the method of spiritual renovation is his *own*. In reference to this mysterious but effective mediation, He proclaims himself to be “the *just* God and the *Saviour*.” For in this mode of reconciliation he makes no compromise with evil. His mercy bears no equivocal character.

It is as holy as his truth. It sustains the moral government of God in every part of its exercise equally with the operations of inexorable justice.

Is it not, indeed, in a very high degree probable, that unnumbered worlds of spiritual intelligencies have watched, with the most intense interest and delight, the manifestation of purity and love, in the death and innocence of the Son of God? “It is through the church,” observes the apostle Paul—that is, through the pardon and felicity of rescued sinners, “that the manifold wisdom of God, is made known to principalities and powers.” It is to this scene of sorrow and of grace, we may conceive celestial spirits to bend their way, in order to gain the most enlarged displays of the attributes of God; to scrutinize the nature of moral evil, and to mark the eternal connection between rectitude and happiness. It is before this spectacle of innocent and voluntary suffering, we may conceive these happy spirits to approve and to share the rapture of the great herald of this mercy to the Gentiles. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.”

Hence, no subject connected with Christianity, can be more attractive and consolatory, than the testimony which the Holy Ghost bears

“to the righteousness of Christ.” “He will reprove the world of righteousness, because I go unto my Father, and ye see me no more.” It was, we are told, “by the eternal Spirit, that Christ offered himself to God.” It was by the same Spirit, he was “quickened,” and enabled to cast away the bonds of the grave, and to ascend above the heavens. The same consistent testimony the Holy Spirit bears to the righteousness of Christ, in every page and promise of revelation, which record the lofty themes of mercy by the atonement of the cross. But he limits not his bright evidence to the *fact* of the resurrection, or to the inspiration of the documents of Scripture. He carries the same testimony within the darkest recesses of the breast, which relies for comfort upon the revealed records of his truth. What other testimony, let it be asked, than the testimony of the Holy Spirit, does the calm hour of meditation and of prayer supply to the soul, when it throws forward its joyous hopes into eternity? What other hand than the invisible hand of the Spirit, applies the balm of atoning blood to the wounds which sin has inflicted? What other accents, than the accents of the Spirit, whisper effective consolation to the agitated bosom; smooth down the rugged recollection of its guilt; and relieve the breast of the dread of perpetual wrath, that keenest pang which ever

shoots across the human heart? Salvation, through the great atonement is, in fact, the absorbing theme of inspiration—the alpha and omega of the scriptures. The epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, the Ephesians, and the Hebrews, contain, more especially, the heart-cheering delineations of this holy mercy to the guilty. To these well-springs of hope, the thirsty soul will incessantly resort, and will find each successive draught more grateful and refreshing than the last !

Various are the schemes which men devise to ease the troubles of conscience, and to render death an event less gloomy than they are yet compelled to esteem it. But all these devices are rather negative than affirmative. They are calculated rather to lull fear, than to excite hope. They are effective, rather to chase death into the region of forgetfulness, than to endear it as an object of attraction. They have their origin, alike in ignorance of God, as in pride of heart. They are the houses built upon the sand, which lift up a fair front beneath sunshine and serenity ; but when the clouds gather, and the winds howl, and the rain descends, these houses rock to their foundations, and bury their deluded occupants in utter desolation. If the law of God require the sinless obedience of love ; and if it make no allowance for deficiency ; if it scans the mo-

tive as well as the action, are we not driven at once upon free mercy for the *smallest degree* of hope? Can the human heart, amidst the inexorable enactments of the law, carry any claim to the throne of judgment, which will not be instantly annihilated? But if, on the other hand, Christ be the constituted head of a spiritual and ransomed race; if his sacred agonies be appropriated by the eternal lawgiver himself, as the price of human forgiveness; if his obedience unto death be declared meritorious of eternal life to the guilty; oh, then, on what a rock of adamant does he build his expectations, who leans his forlorn heart upon the unimpeachable fidelity of God! Although the harsh accents of the law may grate upon his ear, although conscience may engrave its awful sanctions in yet deeper characters upon his heart; although anguished memory may spread before him the long and terrible catalogue of his crimes; yet, in the face of these multiplied sources of accusation, is he privileged to repose in peace. The imperishable record replies to each importunate demand, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thine iniquities as a thick cloud, and as a cloud thy sins." "I am come, that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the

Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool ; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as white as snow."

These, and similar assurances, have prevailed, in every age, to quell the fears, and to sustain the hopes of the pious, as they have approached the moment of their departure from the world. They have been enabled to say, "*Thy word is tried unto the uttermost*, and thy servant loveth it." When flesh and heart have failed ; when earthly objects have shrunk into their real insignificance ; when responsibility and final allotment have become objects so near, as to force themselves within the view of conscience ; when the gates of eternity, and the awful presence of God, have almost burst upon the sight ; then has the unfailing testimony of the Spirit to the righteousness of Christ, animated their souls ! It has not failed them in the last crisis of their fate. The outward shock of dissolution has been severe, but a holy peace has been maintained within. Not all the bitter waters of their iniquities have prevailed to quench their Saviour's love, nor their inconstancy to rob them of the secret joys of his fellowship ! Upheld by his arm, they have securely walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and have felt and feared no evil ; for God himself has comforted them, and permitted the season of mortal extremity to

become the moment of their brightest triumph, and the occasion of their fullest joy!

The early promulgators of Christianity, while they afforded examples of heroic virtue, recorded their unequivocal sentiments of self-renunciation. They rested all their future interests upon the exclusive merits of Jesus Christ. If there be a man who nobly served his master, that man was the apostle Paul; and yet, when he looked forward to the last tribunal, and anticipated the crown of life which he believed the righteous Judge would place upon his head, on what did he repose his confidence? Not on his own integrity, but on his Saviour's merits. This is his language: "What things were gain to me, those I count loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him; not having my own righteousness, which is of the law; but the righteousness which is of God, by faith in Jesus Christ." If language can renounce personal merit, and express dependance on the merits of Christ, it is surely this language of the apostle.

What then are our *own* hopes and expectations for eternity? To this single point, will all our interests be shortly reduced. Perhaps

we are now elated by the glitter, or beat down by the sorrows of the world; but this prosperity, and this adversity, are *names* rather than *things*. They exist but as the agitated or the lulling dream of the night! Our allotment in the eternal world is every thing to our weal or our woe. There *is* a heritage of glory and of joy. One path, and one alone, conducts us to its felicity. Oh! are we moving along that heaven-illumined way? or are we attempting to find a broader road, which will permit us to carry our pride and our passions with us? It cannot be—felicity lies in holiness, and we are healed by the atonement and spirit of Christ alone. He seeks the vast recompense of his labours, his sufferings, and death, in the *full salvation* of his people: This is the ultimate “travail of his soul,” by which “he will be satisfied.” This was the lofty and the generous joy which upheld his soul, when “he endured the cross,” and calmly “despised the shame.” Oh! let us not rob him of his “crown of rejoicing.” Let us rather fly to his bosom, and take our long shelter within his arms of mercy! Rather let us shrink into self-emptiness and abasement, and accept him, as he is freely offered, in that character of accumulated mercy, “our wisdom and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption;” “that he that glorieth, may glory in the Lord.”

How soon shall we require all this rich endowment of unmerited grace ! When we take our companionless journey into the untravelled regions beyond the grave ; when in the full sunlight of truth, we discern between good and evil ; shall we not *then* cling with unutterable tenacity to “ the hope of righteousness by faith,” and to the *friend*, who in our behalf obeyed the stern requisitions of the law, even to the last and sharpest pangs of death ?

FINIS.

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